

BEADLE'S

HALF DIME Library

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Vol. I.

Single
Number.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 20.

A Tale of the Regulators and Road-
Agents of the Black Hills.

The Double Daggers;

OR,

Deadwood Dick's Defiance.

A Companion Novel to Deadwood Dick, Half-Dime
Library Number One.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "CLOVEN HOOF," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

"SOMETHING ABOUT DEADWOOD DICK. Mr. Edward Harris, or, as he is better known, 'Deadwood Dick,' has literally more lives than a cat. Until last week, we have heard little about him, but now his name is whispered in connection with the last stage-coach robbery, near Cheyenne. On Tuesday a watchful band of Deadwood Regulators, led by Dashing Dave, pounced upon him and a portion of his band in Big Lode Canyon, and a terrible struggle ensued. All of the road-agents were slaughtered without quarter—all except Deadwood Dick. He, on his big black stallion, was seen to ride straight up the mountain side, where none could follow. Nor did bullets seem to check his progress. So much, again, for the notorious youth, who is making for himself a name, as a daring road-rider, second to none in the world."—*Deadwood Pioneer*, July 13th.

The above notice, or paragraph, created quite a *furor* of excitement in the Deadwood circles. For perhaps a month past the sensational news of the Black Hills had been rather stagnant. The absence of Indians from the vicinity had lessened the number of reports of murderous attacks, and a quietude among the much-dreaded "gents of the road," had been the means of lulling Deadwood and her sister towns into a drowse of peaceful content and serenity. A glance at Deadwood from a good point of observation, reveals no startling changes. The magic city is nestling down among the tree-fringed hills, as of yore. The imposing mountains appear just as haughty as then; the mountain streams pour wildly down through their rocky channels the same; no change is noticeable unless it be in the size of the golden metropolis, and the number of people who throng its homely streets.

People of almost every nationality may be seen here; men, women and children, vending their wares; eager, expectant miners coming in to seek their fortunes; grim, despondent miners going out "dead-broke"; speculators, sharpers, curious tourists, with now and then an artist or author mixed in; gamblers, bummers, army officers, trappers and scouts—all are here in the make-up of

a monster realistic drama, such as no pen or brush can fitly portray.

Journalism in Deadwood has not reached that acme of perfection attained in our eastern cities; still, some enterprising individual, with the aid of pen, scissors and paste, and a dilapidated hand-press, has succeeded in bringing to light a very creditable sheet, considering everything, whose heading is *The Pioneer*, it being devoted to the mining interest, etc.

The office of the worthy newspaper was upon the second floor of a building directly across from the "Metropolitan" saloon, and was very scantily furnished, and attended by a very wise-looking young gentleman from the East, who was a reporter, and a combination of the city dandy and crushed actor.

This individual was perched on a high stool behind the office desk, one bright morning a few days subsequent to the issue of the paper containing the above paragraph, engaged in writing an editorial, when the door was unceremoniously opened and a person entered the room. Augustus looked up with a patronizing nod, and beheld a broad-shouldered, bewhiskered miner standing before him—an exceed-

ingly rough-looking customer he was, attired in dirty, mud-splashed corduroy, with a small arsenal of sixes belted about his waist. Little of the face was visible through a thick bush of red beard, but the gleam from the small black eyes was dangerous.

"Howdy do!" saluted Augustus, in a business-like manner, giving an extra flourishing stroke of his pen, and then giving his attention to the visitor. "In what way might I be able to serve you, sir?"

"Humph!" and the miner gave a contemptuous grunt as he glanced about the office. "Reckon this ar' the shebang whar they print the 'Pi'neer, hey?"

"This is the editorial room of that publication, yes," replied Augustus, loftily.

"Tho't so. Hain't no more'n I expected. 'Spect the boss be about, not?"

"I am sorry to say Mr. Wilbur isn't in, at present, sir. Important business called him away to Elizabeth City over an hour ago. He, however, placed me in power to transact all business for the establishment, and consequently I make no hesitation in placing my services at your disposal."

"Waal, I opine et doan't make much difference, atwixt you'n' me. Reckon you'll do jes's well as Mister Wilbur; leastwise I'll make you. I've got an egg to break w' somebody, an' jes's lief it'd be with you as anybody else."

Here the miner stopped and fumbled in his pocket, industriously, at last bringing forth a late copy of the *Pioneer*. This he spread carefully upon the desk, in front of our Augustus, and with one white, slender finger, so greatly at contrast with his general appearance, he pointed to the large-type heading of a column: "Something about Deadwood Dick," as per paragraph.

"D'ye see that?" he demanded, in a voice that made Augustus shiver—"d'ye see them 'ar lines?"

"Exactly—as plainly, perhaps, as I see you. It is a paragraph concerning Deadwood Dick, the notorious young outlaw."

"Yas, that is w'at it ar', an' no mistake. Now, one o' my errands, here, ar' to see the individual who writ them truthful lines uv prosaic."

"I am proud to say I penned that sensational paragraph," announced Augustus, drawing himself up to his fullest height, "and if you have come to remunerate me for my interest in Mr. Dick, I shall be most happy and grateful to accept a V, promising devotion to the cause in the future."

The customer in corduroy stared.

"So you writ it, did you?" he asked.

"Assuredly, I did!"

"Waal, mind that you don't write another like et, if you doan't want ter git knocked inter the middle of day before yisterday. Deadwood Dick do not keer to be made quite so free w', about these times. Now, about my other errand. I want ye to put a 'vertis'ment in your *Pi'neer*, w'at'll cover a hull page, an' I want it in big type, too, so everybody can read it, right plain."

"Exactly. I understand what you wish—a display ad-



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vertisement, such as will attract universal attention. Yes, yes; I see; I see. Such a one will cost you only a trifle, and undoubtedly prove advantageous to the greatest degree. Two hundred dollars will settle the bill."

"Dog cheap, ain't you?" sneered the miner. "It's a wonder you can make a living, you're so cheap. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. You go ahead and 'set up' the advertisement I'm goin' to give you, an' charge it to Deadwood Dick. If it comes out in the next issue of ther *Pioneer*, you'll get your pay, right off; likewise, ef it don't, you'll git a bullet through your skull the first time you show your pate outside this hencoop, you bet!"

"Ugh! you surely don't mean it!"

"Reckon I do. My word ain't to be larfed at, I want you to understand. Will ye do it?"

"I could not, possibly," protested Augustus. "I have no right to insert a gratuitous advertisement, you see, because this is not my paper. If it was I should be glad to accommodate you. As it is, I cannot."

"We'll see about that, my young rooster—we'll see about that. Now, jist open yer ears an' listen w'at's on this bit o' dockment, so's you'll remember it 'till ye put it inter type."

So saying the rough visitor brought forth another piece of paper from his pocket, and after studying the doubtful scrawls for a few moments, he read, aloud:

"Deadwood Dick, the Road-Agent, desires to say, through these columns, that he defies Deadwood itself and all its inhabitants; that he is even now within the confines of the Magic City, and will soon show the so-called Deadwood Regulators that for every Road-Agent killed in Big Lode Canyon, the other day, he will guarantee the demise of a Regulator. Let Dashing Dave beware! let all Deadwood beware! for the Prince of the Road is on his muscle!"

"The Public's dutiful servant,
DEADWOOD DICK."

"(Signed,) That's bizness clean to the spinal menynygitis!" triumphantly declared the miner. "That'll show folks that Dickey and his b'yees 'hain't afeard; no more they ain't. Now, you *Pioneer* cuss, reckillect ef that don't cum out in glarin' style in the next issue, your grave's dug. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, yes!" nodded Augustus, more alarmed than he cared to have the miner know he was. "I will try to get your 'ad' in, somehow, only don't trouble us again."

"Waal, that depends. Maybe ye'll heer from us again, sumtime afore you die, an' ag'in maybe ye won't. Now, good-day to ye, an' remember w'at ye'll git, if that ar' 'vertis'ment don't come out!"

Augustus bowed, stiffly, and the uncouth visitor took his departure.

The next issue of the *Pioneer* contained the bold warning of Deadwood Dick. To say it caused a sensation would be putting it mild. There was an unprecedented excitement in mining circles; the article was the theme of discussion for a hundred tongues or more; capitalists frowned and hugged closer to their gold; miners kept their weapons handy; Dashing Dave's Regulators kept shady; inside of ten hours after the appearance of the notice in the *Pioneer*, the "solid" men of the magic city had made up a purse, and a thousand dollars was the price set for the capture of the notorious Deadwood Dick.

The so-styled Regulators were, and are to-day, under the pay of the influential men of Deadwood—a sort of finance body-guard, waging war against road-agents and thieves generally, and striking blows in the defense of justice.

No doubt they have done some good in their particular calling, but positive it is that they have caused the loss of more human life than the outlaws themselves.

Dashing Dave was a tall, brawny, handsome borderman of three and twenty years, who had won a great name as an Indian-fighter during the troubles preceding the fatal Custer engagement, and was feared by a large class of the desperate characters who infested the Black Hills. He had lost his family—a wife and a month-old babe—by the border ruffians, since coming into the Hills, and this had embittered his whole nature against mankind in the guise of an outlaw. He struck blindly, without a care or thought of the life he was taking; it was for vengeance and the interests of an all-powerful people.

He, with a half-dozen of his comrades were gathered in the Metropolitan saloon, on the evening after the latest issue of the *Pioneer*, discussing matters in general.

"There seems no doubt left but that Deadwood Dick is really down among us again," said one of the party, Big-eared John by name, and as hardy a border veteran as ever pulled a trigger. "He continues to grow bolder every full moon, darn my old peels if he don't."

"If I mistake not, his race is nearly run," replied Dashing Dave, his eyes constantly roving around as though in search of some one. "He has carried a high hand around these parts, too long, already, and you mark my word he'll soon come to grief. If once I can get a bead on him, it will be good-by Deadwood Dick."

"Reckon Justin McKenzie's wife would take it mighty hard if Dick wer' to git put under the sod. He's her brother, you know, and she thinks the world of him."

"Cursed if I care. Duty is duty, and no females shall stand in the way. Have you put a watch on McKenzie's shanty, as I ordered?"

"Yes, but you'll never trap your game in that direction. Mr. Road-Agent Dick is shy'er 'an a fox, and twice as slippery as any eel ye ever see'd, and

when ye ketch him napping, jes' consider the millenium clost to hand."

"Well, wait and see. Keep your eyes and ears about you, and maybe you'll scare up something when you least expect it."

So saying Dashing Dave sauntered off through the densely thronged apartment, followed by many admiring glances. He was really a dashing-looking fellow, when you came to view him closely, with his commanding form, and genial, sun-burnt face.

He was a man of great muscular development; was an unerring rifle and pistol shot; his speed in a foot-race and grace in the saddle, had once upon a time attracted favorable comment from that worthy organ, the *Pioneer*. His eyes were brown and his hair of a like color, while his goatee and mustache were jetty black. The expression of his countenance was frank, yet stern; pleasant, yet possessed of the power to be very grave.

Let us follow him.

The "Metropolitan" has been enlarged since we were here with the reader in "Deadwood Dick." All now, is under one vast roof and in one apartment; still the place is crowded night and day.

Drinking, gambling, dancing, fighting, and all the associate vices are carried on here; there are scores of other similar places in Deadwood, but the "Met." holds her head proudly above competition, as the chief headquarters of the magic city.

Dashing Dave sauntered through the immense room, casting careless, yet sharp glances on either side as he moved on; nodding occasionally at some acquaintance, or, mayhap, scowling at an enemy; for he had many—possibly more enemies than friends among the rough class who go to make up the swarming population of the Black Hills metropolis.

He presently chanced upon a vacant seat at an empty table, and was not long in making himself the possessor of it, for a chair in a Deadwood saloon after sunset is a scarce piece of furniture.

Not long had he been seated, however, when he was tapped gently upon the shoulder, and turning he beheld a young man standing just behind him.

He was superbly built, and attired in tanned buckskin, but little or nothing of his face could be seen on account of an immense slouch hat that was drawn down over his eyes.

"Well?" demanded Dave, interrogatively, "what will you have?"

"This chair, if you please!" was the decisive response. "I sat here before you did, and you usurped my place while I was away for a cigar."

"Can't help it, my friend. I found this seat vacant, and I reckon I'd 'em keep 'em, 'round this ranch; so go along and find the mate!" advised the Regulator.

"Which I decline to do," replied the stranger, as coolly as if he were an iceberg. "That chair belongs to me, and here's what says so!"

He held a cocked revolver in his right hand, which was as white as a woman's. The glitter of the polished weapon and the tone of his address both bespoke business!

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO FUGITIVES.

"Sh! don't make a noise. If their attention is attracted we are lost!"

So spoke a young girl, over whose head had passed barely seventeen summers.

The scene was at the bottom of a deep, dark canyon, walled in by the mighty tree-clad mountains. The girl and a male companion stood secreted in a clump of undergrowth at a point where one smaller gulch or canyon on either side, branched off from the main one, making it a sort of natural turnpike. The branches were much narrower and deeper than the other, and in them the night's gloom was more intense.

The girl and her companion, a small, stout negro of tremendous muscular power, were entirely screened from view among the underbrush, while all the time they were enabled to command a straight outlook down the main and transverse canyons, into which the feeble soaring moon slanted a few yellow rays.

Up the main canyon, coming directly toward the "split" or "divide," was a company of horsemen, perhaps a dozen in all, advancing at a slow jogging trot; and it was to these that the young girl had alluded.

"Yas, I'm mum as a baked clam," replied the negro. "If dem debbils cum w're I can git just one good kick at 'em, I'll spile 'em fur all time."

"Shut up your gabble!" commanded the girl, authoritatively. "I do believe you would like to have them discover us."

"No sech a thing, Miss Leone; not a bit o' trufe in dem words, bless me if I dar is. What d'ye s'pose I want dem ornery skunks to git at us, fur? Who'd get a wuss cracked skull nor ole Ben Johnson, I wonder?"

"That's so, Ben!" with a low laugh. "You'd be apt to get your share of the punishment. But take courage, my good old trusty friend. They may pass by without nosing us out, and if they do we are all hunki-dori, for in the vast confines of this mountainous region we surely can find a safe concealment from our enemies."

"An' ef dey don't, Miss Leone?"

"If they don't—well, we must fight until we fall, for I will die by my own hand, rather than fall again into the power of Jasper Leslie."

"Dem's my sentiments, perzac'ly, ma'am, an' here's w'at'll fight his toe-nails off, clean to der roots, fer yer sweet sake. Yere comes the ornery coons, now, peekin' about, a-tryin' to spy us out."

The horsemen had been drawing nearer during their conversation, and had now halted at the divide,

but a few paces distant from where the fugitives were crouching.

There were twelve of them, all rough, bearded borderers, save two, whose appearance was a trifle less uncouth and grizzly. The one was a portly man of perhaps forty years, with a full, florid face, ornamented with "Burnside" whiskers, which were slightly streaked with gray; black eyes and shaggy eyebrows to match; an aquiline nose, and a complexion of a swarthy brown. His dress was scrupulously neat, and the diamond pin upon his immaculate shirt front was of the first water.

The other man was older by perhaps ten years;—was poor in flesh; scrawny, shriveled, wrinkled. His face was a mirror of his black, evil nature; his eyes constantly emitted gleams of a baleful light; dissipation and debauchery had wrecked his life; avarice and greed for gain mainly kept him alive; at a glance, he was a repulsive object to gaze upon, with his furrowed, haggard, sallow face; his sinister eyes; his huge wolfish mouth, and the accompanying grotesque features, and all relieved by a matted shock of hair and beard of purest white.

His attire, however, was even superior in texture and worth to that of his companion, being cut in the latest style, and of more costly material. Diamonds glittered upon his tie, upon his shirt front, and upon his fingers—not paste, by any means, but the real, priceless gems.

"Aha!" muttered the girl, Leone, as her eyes rested upon him; "if ever I was tempted to commit murder it is now. Jasper Leslie, I could kill you, base, designing wretch that you are, without a bit of compassion!"

"Dem's my sentiments, eggscactly!" declared Johnson, emphatically, his eyes rolling back comically. "I could jes' put a bullock t'r'u dat ornery coon's cranium w'd be best of spirit."

Just here let us pause and describe the woman and her sable companion.

Leone was of medium hight, and possessed of a plump, symmetrical form, which, in its delicately rounded outlines, was little less than perfection. A tapering waist, a noble bust, a small, arching neck, on which was saucily perched a round little head, surmounted with an indiscriminate confusion of curls of brick-red color; a fair, creamy complexion, here and there tinted with blushing roses of health and youth; soft, expressive hazel eyes, and a mouth of sweetest expression.

So much a casual glance discovers of her ripening, rich young beauty, but a finer beauty she is possessed of in her sweet, warm, sunny disposition; and as we study her traits of character, her speech, her every motion, we each moment find some new point in her to admire.

Her dress was of coarse, serviceable woolen stuff, probably purchased ready-made, as it exposed a very pretty pair of ankles to view, and feet that were incased in richly ornamented moccasins. A round fur turban sat upon her brick-colored curls, and this constituted her outfit, unless we include a handsome Sharpe sporting-rifle, and a pair of pistols in her girde.

Johnson was literally blacker than the "ace of spades," and short and very powerful of build. His fat, sable face, and ludicrous rolling eyes were expressive of a jovial nature, and told a true story, for old Ben was one of the best-hearted souls imaginable. But when his ire was provoked, he was a very tiger to fight; hence, Leone was glad to have him on her side against her enemies. He was attired in a semi-civilized fashion, and armed with rifle, knife and pistols—the common equipment in the delectable Black Hills country, where very few go about unarmed.

As the horsemen came to a halt, the repulsive individual, whom Leone had called Jasper Leslie, gave vent to a horrible curse.

"Here's a pretty go! Where in — is our game gone, now, I should like to know?"

"Yes, you may well ask that, Jasper Leslie," sneered he with the "Burnsides." "If you have let the girl escape, you know the consequences. Off comes your head, in less than no time."

"I'll find the girl if I have to raise hell on earth!" declared the old man, with another oath. "She can not escape me, try though she may."

"You must find her soon, then, you old curmudgeon, for I shall not long keep these men under my pay, to assist you. It's too expensive."

"Let 'em go, then! They don't do any purtickler good, as I see. I can find the gal jest as well w'out 'em, as w'it 'em, for that matter. Cuss that nigger! If I ever get hold of him, I'll rip his carcass open in short meter!"

"Will you, dough?" grinned Johnson, from his concealment. "Spec's it's dis chunk o' coal-black he has referwence to, ain't it, Miss Leone?"

"Yes, he means you. But, hush! we must not let them know we are here."

"Yes," a corded he of the Burnsides; "if the nigger hadn't been with her, she would never have got this far."

"Dat's a comblimen' fur Johnsing," chuckled the sable gentleman, in the bushes.

"It's true," whispered Leone, gratefully. "But for you, Ben, I should never have eluded them this long."

"Dem's my sentiments, eggscactly."

"I see no prospect of overtaking them, to-night," growled one of the men. "Here we ar' nigh six miles from Deadwood, an' hain't see'd hide nor ha'r on 'em. I propose we camp down yere, an' wait fer daylight."

"Not much!" retorted Leslie, savagely. "Guess they've got fur enuff start now, w'out givin' 'em any more. We'll all take a good stiff drink of 'mountain dew,' to brace up our nerves with, and then go on."

A large bottle was accordingly produced from one of the saddle-bags, and passed around, each man helping himself to a liberal allowance.

"Now which canyon shall we take?" demanded Brierly, the one who had proposed to halt on the spot for the night. "We don't dare to split up, for fear of road-agents; an' here's three routes the gal may hev took."

"We'll take the main course," decided Leslie. "The fools would ha' been more likely to 'a' took this, knowin' it was more traveled, an' there were not so much danger o' their gettin' lost. Eh! Syd-nor?"

"I do not know anything about it. All I want is the girl, and you must get her for me, or you shall never leave the Hills alive. Do you hear?"

"I ain't at all deaf, I reckon," grunted the other. "Come! come! this won't do; fall into file and off we go!"

According to the order, the whole cavalcade put spurs to their steeds, and dashed away up the main canyon, noisily through the night's dim light.

"Thank Heaven they are gone," muttered Leone, when they were out of sight beyond a curve in the course. "It was a very narrow escape."

"Dem's my sentiments' eggsactly," responded Johnson, drawing a long sigh of relief. "I'm werry glad dey didn't poke dera noses in yore;—not beca'se I'se 'fraid o' enny hurt they would do to us, but I should orfuly 'a' hated to squashed dem noses!"

"You have a very tender heart, Ben," said Leone, laughing. "You'd never make a general, for all your worth. But, now that our enemies have ske-daddled, what are we going to do?"

"Jes' w'at I was cogitatin' on, Miss Leone. S'posin' we huff it back to Deadwood!"

"No! that would be next to following up our enemies and surrendering ourselves. Without doubt, Curtis Sydnor and my father have posted spies there, who would nab us as soon as we showed our faces."

Johnson did not reply, immediately, but stepped out into the gulch, a few paces, to where a bar of light from the soaring young moon slanted down over the mountain-top and kissed the earth. All was now quiet.

The hoof-strokes of the horses had become inaudible; the wind fanned a low, sweet symphony through the dark cloaked pines; music sweeter than all emanated from a clear little stream that babbled adown through the left gulch.

"I's pec's it's our duty to do sumfin for Dianer," commented Johnson, gazing around him with a rather grim expression of countenance, "but bress de Lor! if dis gen'man o' color knows w'at. Miss Leone, yer de bossess; w'at shall we do to break de fronolony ob our situation?"

"Only one thing remains," replied the maiden, stepping from her concealment. "We must take one of these transverse canyons, and follow it until we can find a secure hiding-place. The left one has a stream of water—let us take that."

"Berry well. I'se no 'jections, providin' it are fur de best. I'll go ahead, an' you can bring up de rear."

So saying the negro threw the repeating rifle in the hollow of his arm, and led the way into the left canyon, Leone following close at his heels, holding her own weapon in readiness for instant use.

"There is one thing in our favor, Ben," she said, as they hurried along. "There are none among the band that can read a trail, and whatever signs we leave behind in passing over this hard rocky bottom, would be hardly perceptible to an experienced trapper."

"Dem's my sentiments' eggsactly, Miss. De coon as can nose us out are berry smart."

On they went, their footsteps awaking only slight echoes up the mountain-side. The canyon grew gradually narrower and deeper, the walls on either side rising to a stupendous height. Far up overhead was the dimly starlit sky; the moon had hid its head behind an aerial peak, leaving the canyon in darkness. Yet it was light enough for Johnson to see the route ahead of him, and lead the way carefully, avoiding the rougher paths that Leone might have it easier.

And thus the twain wandered on through the weird night.

Johnson had spent the latter years of his life upon the frontier, and was a thoroughly good trapper, his familiarity with mountain and prairie rendering him invaluable as a guide. His one failing was a liking to serve under somebody—to have some one go ahead and take the responsibility of an undertaking; then he was all right and ready to perform his duties.

He was very keen of hearing and observing, but tonight he was less guarded than usual, and as a result, ere he was scarcely aware of the fact, in rounding an abrupt curve in the canyon, he came face to face with a horseman, who had halted, evidently hearing their approach by the echo of their footsteps.

Leone uttered a startled scream as her eyes rested upon the unexpected apparition, and stepped closer to her sable companion as if feeling reassurance, that he was with her. Johnson stopped stock-still as he beheld the apparition, and would have raised his repeater, only that he perceived a gleaming pistol in each hand of the stranger covered him.

The grim rider* was the first one to speak, and these were the initiatory words, in a growling, deep voice:

"Well? who be ye an' where ye goin'?"

"That depen's all on circumstances," replied Johnson. "My name is Johnsing—Benjamin Brewster Johnsing. Who the debbil d'ye s'pec' you are?"

The horseman uttered a loud, hoarse laugh. "It can't be that ye're long in these parts, or ye'd know

well enough that but one man in all the Black Hills carries sich a frontpiece as I do—an indelible scar stamped there by the lightning hand of God. Once seen, I always make it a point never to be forgotten. My name is Black Harper!"

"Phew! you don't tell us dat you is dat debbil's imp, hisself, do you? I heerd ob Black Harper in Deadwood, and dey said dat he was a cuss!"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed the horseman, his deep voice becoming boisterous; "sed I was a cuss, did they? Haw! haw! haw! that's better than three-fingers o' red rum. Yes, nigger, that's about my caliber. I'm a cuss clean from my dirty socks to the top o' my attic, you bet, and if you don't find me so, why chalk it down that I'm a Centennial liar!"

"I don't doubt your word de least bit, Mr. Black Harper, so jes' be obligin' enuff to lower de aim ob your revolvers. Seein's we've met, I's'pec' you in-ten to do sumt'inks, eh? Speak up!"

"Waal, I shouldn't wonder. I reckon ye don't go up this canyon no furdur, not if this hoss knows hisself. Hello! by all that's sublime and ridiculous! what d'ye call that 'ar' behind you? A female—a real live kickin' critter of the Eve persuasion? It is, or I'm a liar, an' no one ever calls Black Harper a liar but once. I say, you brick-top critter, step out hyer so I can git a fair squint at ye!"

"Hide behind me!" cautioned Johnson. "Don't show yer face for your life, honey."

"D'ye hear?" commanded the outlaw, riding closer. "Come out, I say."

But Leone refused, for, well aware of her own wondrous beauty, she knew it boded her no good to let the ruffian feast his eyes upon her.

"You get back, old coon!" ordered Ben, his white eyes rolling threateningly. "I jes' advise ye to go along an' mind your business, or dar'll be a corpus around here fur some one to bury. You hear me!"

But Black Harper uttered an oath of contempt, and leveling a revolver at the negro's heart, pulled the trigger!

CHAPTER III.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S HANGING.

"On! you can't scare me worth a cent," said the Regulator, calmly, as he gazed down the throat of the other's weapon. "I wasn't brought up in the woods to be scared out by an owl, much less, an ornery looking pill like you."

"You were evidently brought up where good-breeding was a dead letter!" was the sarcastic response. "Come! are you going to vacate? I do not wish to hurt you, but if you don't get out of there before I have time to count thirty, there will be a first-class job for an undertaker, hereabouts."

Dashing Dave stared at the cool stranger in astonishment. He flattered himself that he knew pretty nearly every person in Deadwood, but could not recall the face and figure of this fellow, whoever he might be. Certain it was that he was one of those cool, reckless characters so often met with in the western wilderness, who was wont to falter at nothing that would further his own ends.

"Who are you?" demanded the Regulator, still refusing to move; trying to divert the other's attention while his hand stole toward his belt. But the watchful eyes of the stranger caught the move, and the hammer of his revolver came back to full cock, with an ominous click.

"No matter who I am," was the stern reply! I have counted twenty. Ten more, and off goes the summit of your skull, if you don't pucker up!"

Dashing Dave reflected a moment, and then rose from the chair. He had no doubt but the fellow would "salt" him, as he said, and this was against the grain of his nature; so he concluded it best to yield, for the present.

"There, curse you, take the chair!" he said, fiercely. "But, mind you, I will have my revenge for this. I don't chew insults without retrieval!"

"You seem to take 'em in, kind of natural, like!" laughed the victor, taking possession of the chair. "Hunt up another perch, pardner, or sit down on your thumb, an' let's take a beer. That will wash down the burning sensation of your defeat!"

"No! nothing but your blood will wash it down!" hoarsely growled the chief, as he strode away, leaving the stranger laughing quietly to himself.

Later in the evening the same individual was still seated at the table, puffing slowly at a cigar, a glass of untouched beer at his elbow. He seemed wrapt in deep thought, yet it was noticeable that his black eyes were ever roving over the motley assembly, as if in search for some one.

Unobserved Dashing Dave had worked his way around to a position directly in the rear of his enemy, and in a moment when the stranger least expected it, his hat was snatched from his head, revealing his face to the gaze of all the nearest bystanders, under the full glare of the gaslight.

A cry of astonishment came then.

Dashing Dave recoiled back, aghast, a terrible oath peeling from his lips:

"Deadwood Dick!" he cried.

"Deadwood Dick, the road-agent!" seconded the crowd, gathering around breathlessly, knives and pistols drawn in an instant.

The face so suddenly uncovered was strikingly handsome, and any one who had ever once seen Ned Harris the road-prince, could not doubt that this was indeed the man. It was the same peculiarly fearless expression of countenance; the same stern yet pleasant mouth; the same prominent nose, and the same piercing eyes and long waving hair of jetty blackness. To be sure there were absent some of the personal characteristics of Deadwood Dick—the black buck-skin suit, the black gloves and the accompanying black horse. But, there was not a person in the room who was not convinced that this was the lawless Prince of the Road.

And there he sat, quietly, under all the glances showered upon him, a sarcastic smile breaking out about his lips.

"Gentlemen!" he said, biting off the end of a fresh cigar, "you all seem to see something uncommonly attractive about me. Do you for a moment imagine that I am the notorious road-agent of the Black Hills, whom you call Deadwood Dick?"

"We don't imagine nothing of the kind, my gay young Claude Duval of modern times!" declared Dashing Dave, triumphantly. "You're Deadwood Dick, and everybody knows it, by one glance at your face. The features of Ned Harris are too prominent and bold in expression, to easily be forgotten."

"Nevertheless," replied the young man, coldly, "you've got hold of the wrong chap, this time. I'm not Deadwood Dick; neither do I claim any relationship to that illustrious gentleman. My handle is Hawk—Gerald Hawk, at your service, and I hail from Austin, Texas."

"Haw! haw! haw!" A great shout of derision went up from the crowd. Convinced as they were of this man's identity, they regarded his denial as a clever falsehood, originated with a design to hoodwink them. But the plan failed to work, whether intended so, or otherwise.

"That'll do to tell marines!" sneered the Regulator, with a wink at the crowd. "Here's an eye you can't shut up, however. I know you're Deadwood Dick, and, more than that, that you're bound to swing, now that we've fairly got you. What say you, my boys?"

"Ay! ay! ay! ay!" assented a chorus of voices. "String him up. Hang him for his crimes."

"Correct! Let his death be a lesson to all who choose the life of a road-agent. Seize him, and some one get a rope!"

A dozen willing hands grasped the cool road-agent, if road-agent he was, and held him imprisoned in a firm grip, while his wrists were bound behind him. He made no resistance, probably because he realized that it would be useless. He saw that all believed him to be the famous young road-agent; he knew that nobody would interfere in behalf of one whose numerous acts of outlawry and crime had gained him almost a world-wide notoriety.

"You have made a serious mistake, gentlemen!" he protested, as a rope was noosed about his neck. "If you suspend me, thinking you are ridding the world of Deadwood Dick, you are committing one of the gravest errors of your lives, for I am not the man—I swear it!"

"You can swear as much as you please, my fine fellow!" taunted Dashing Dave, ordering the arrangement of the noose. "I don't care if you tell a hull bushel of lies, it won't help your case one iota. You're bound to have a swing, Deadwood Dick or no Deadwood Dick; so dry up, an' say your prayers. There, boys, that'll do; now, then, follow me and trot out your gay and festive road-agent. There's plenty o' trees in Deadwood gulch as is itchin' to groan beneath the weight o' this light-fingered prisoner. Come along, then, one and all, for there's music in the air!"

And so saying, the Captain of the Regulators led the way out of the thronged saloon, followed by an escort of a score of his own men with the prisoner; and behind them surged the noisy crowd, eager to witness the execution.

Out into the busy main street of the magic city they marched, making a weird procession under the light of the soaring midsummer night's moon, the yells and shouts growing louder and more boisterous each moment.

The nearest tree suitable was several hundred yards down the gulch, in front of a neat little cottage, and toward this the would-be executioners hurried their victim, anxious to get through their vengeful work.

At last the tree was reached, and a great ring was formed around it by the uncouth and grizzled audience. Inside this ring the prisoner was conducted, and positioned beneath the tree's out-spreading branches, the free end of his halter being tossed up over a stout limb, and dropping on the other side to be seized in the relentless grasp of half a score of Regulators.

Thus in an instant all was ready for the execution.

"Fellers!" cried Dashing Dave, turning to the vast multitude assembled, when everything was in readiness, "we have here, ripe for suspension, one of the worst desperadoes in the whole Black Hills country, namely—Deadwood Dick. For nearly two years he has held a reign of terror in these regions, and his daring crimes are without equal. All of you know that more than a dozen men in Deadwood have fallen by his hand. Does it then stand to reason that we should give him a formal trial?"

"No! no!" shouted a hundred voices. "String him up without no trial. He'll get trial enough going hummin' along the road to purgatory. Yank him up, an' let's see what kind of stuff he's made of. Hurra! one, two, three, now, and give him a boost!"

"Hold! what is the meaning of this?" cried a newcomer, elbowing his way through the crowd and confronting Dashing Dave. "What would you do?"

"None of your business, Justin McKenzie," retorted the young Regulator chief, insolently. "Reckon ye can see, without bein' so inquisitive. We've got your estimable brother-in-law, Deadwood Dick, here, and we're a-goin' to give him a tight-rope lesson. D'ye understand?"

McKenzie, looking a trifle older and more manly than when we last saw him, turned with a start and gazed at the prisoner, whom before he had only given a casual glance.

"Great Heaven, Harris, is this you?" he cried, stepping closer, his features working with emotion. "I hoped never to see you in such a fix as this. God grant that Anita may never hear of it!"

* For description of Black Harper, see last page.

"Anita?" echoed the prisoner, his face assuming a puzzled expression, that, however, did not deceive the crowd. "Who is Anita? Who are you?"

"What! don't you know me, Harris? Is it possible that, in the few short months since we separated in Flower Pocket gulch, you have forgotten me, Justin McKenzie? Don't you remember?—I married your sister, Anita!"

The prisoner shook his head, a smile wreathing his lips.

"No, I am positive I never saw you." Then a new light seemed to dawn upon him. "Ah! I see," he added; "you take me for Deadwood Dick, eh?"

"Certainly. You are he—or, in reality, Ned Harris," replied McKenzie.

"No, I am not. My name is Gerald Hawk, and I am from Austin, Texas. These fools have mistaken me for some desperado of your accursed Black Hills country, and it looks probable that I am elected to swing for this other fellow's crimes."

McKenzie looked grave.

"I'm afraid that won't work, Harris," he said, pityingly. "You are too well known around these parts to attempt deception. Would to God I had it in my power to help you, but I fear I have not."

"I don't crave help!" replied the prisoner, half-angrily. "I have heard it said that Deadwood Dick is brave, and if I am to die in his name, it will be bravely. I have never done anything bad, that I am afraid to face my God, so these gentlemen can go ahead with their murder as soon as suits their convenience."

Inwardly, McKenzie groaned, and he turned to Dashing Dave to plead the case.

"You see how it is," he said earnestly; "the poor fellow is not in his right mind. Surely, gentlemen, you will not hang a man in his condition."

"We just will, though!" growled the Regulator, grimly. "Reckon I'm a cool thousand richer when that devil's feet air off 'n terra firma. Crazy or no crazy, he's got to swing. If you don't want to witness the performance, Mr. McKenzie, you'd better step out of sight, for I'm going to give him the final h't, direct, now. Get ready, boys!"

McKenzie sprang to the prisoner's side and flung his arms about his neck.

"Good-by, Harris, old fellow!" he said, huskily, tears raining from his eyes. "I must leave you now, for I cannot stop these men, and would not witness your death-struggles. Die bravely, with your heart given over to God, and we will pray for your salvation—Anita and I. Have you any word to send to her, Ned?"

"None!" replied the prisoner, briefly.

McKenzie then gave him one last brotherly embrace, and turning staggered blindly away, the crowd parting to let him pass.

Then, just as the moon seemed the most ghostly bright, and a puff of wind sighed a mournful dirge through the branches of the gallows-tree, Dashing Dave waved his hand to the men at the rope, there was a universal cry of "Heave oh!" and the doomed prisoner was pulled up into mid-air.

His struggles were fortunately of short duration. After a slight writhing and twisting of the limbs, the body straightened downward, and life was pronounced extinct.

"You need not let him down!" ordered Dashing Dave, "but fasten the rope to yonder fence-post, and let him hang there till sunrise. I tell you there's nothing like making sure of a thing. Deadwood Dick was such a scaly customer that I would not be much surprised to see him resurrected after hanging there a whole week."

Accordingly the crowd dispersed and the ghastly object was left hanging alone in the light of the mid-summer night's moon, a fearful example of what justice is in the wild Far West.

The crowd dispersed to the various haunts of crime and vice, to talk over the uncommon events of the evening, and drink over the death of the road-agent prince, who had spread such a reign of terror and dread wherever he had gone.

Now that he was dead, did it not promise to put an end to some of the bold robberies and depredations? At least so thought the over-confident population of Deadwood. But, while believing this, another cloud arose upon their horizon.

Would not the followers of the lynched road-rider seek terrible vengeance—a bloody, reckless revenge for their esteemed leader's death?

It was highly probable that they would.

On the following morning, the lynched outlaw's body was not hanging there beneath the fatal gallows-tree.

During the darkness just preceding day-dawn, some one had come and cut down the lifeless corpse and removed it forever from the gaze of Deadwood's thronging population.

Whither, no one knew—no one cared. There seemed to be a universal satisfaction in believing that the notorious Black Rider was dead; many let the hanging affair die entirely out of their minds, while others prolonged its discussion to a nine-days' wonder.

A few days later the Black Hills Pioneer came out with a big-lined editorial, commemorative of the death of Deadwood Dick, describing his capture and death, in an astonishing flow of language, ending with the announcement that the said paper was hopeful that the deceased would not forget to send down the amount of that little bill he owed them for advertising.

And on rolled the wild, bustling tenor of life in Deadwood's magic city, as if nothing had occurred to mar its peace of mind.

CHAPTER IV.

DEADWOOD DICK'S VOW OF VENGEANCE.

DASHING DAVE, the Chief of the Regulators, was a

man who might be admired at a distance, but come to make his personal acquaintance and study his character, and you found him far from your expectation. He was, to all outward appearances, a thoroughly upright gentleman, yet he was as bad at heart as many of his fellow-men who bore a far worse reputation.

One day as he was lounging in front of the notorious Metropolitan, engaged in inspecting the constant throng of passers-by, a woman, trim of figure and a trifle haughty of carriage, came down the street from the direction of a row of new cottages that had recently been erected and tenanted.

She was clad in deep mourning, and so closely veiled that nothing of her face was visible; but her form was sufficient assurance that her face was pretty, and she was one woman of a dozen in Deadwood to attract attention.

Dashing Dave watched her narrowly from the time he first caught sight of her, until she had hurriedly passed, and vanished down the street.

"I wonder who that trim craft is?" he muttered, puffing away at his pipe meditatively. "I don't recollect of ever seeing her before. Wonder if she holds out in one of them shanties? Confound it, I ought to recognize her, for I reckon there ain't many females in Deadwood I don't know. If she comes back this way, I'm hanged if I don't make a dive for her acquaintance."

True to his word he continued to lounge about the street, watching narrowly for the reappearance of the veiled woman who had so excited his curiosity. Several hours passed, and he was growing impatient at the delay, when once more he caught a glimpse of the trim figure coming from the direction in which she had previously gone. But unfortunately for his designs, she was accompanied by a young man, well-dressed and ordinarily good-looking, whom he perceived at a glance to be Justin McKenzie, the brother-in-law of the dead road-agent.

"Ha! then, perhaps that is his wife?" the Regulator mused, allowing them to pass without interruption. "She is in mourning for Deadwood Dick, I reckon. Yes, that solves the matter about her. But I wonder where they live? In that new row of shanties, eh?"

McKenzie had changed his place of residence since the death of Deadwood Dick, and it was highly probable that he had taken one of the referred to cottages, for he was extensively engaged in mining, and reaping so rich a harvest that he could afford something a little above the average.

Unconsciously the Regulator followed on behind them, at a safe distance, until he saw them disappear within one of the rude structures; then he turned back toward the Metropolitan, an evil gleam in his sinister eye.

"I hate that McKenzie!" he growled, biting savagely at his nails by way of relieving his feelings. "He is too stuck up with his ideas, entirely. I'd like to give him a dig, and I believe I have found just how to touch him in a tender spot. I'll get up a flirtation with his wife, and that will be genuine torment to him, for he is as jealous of her, I have heard, as the day is long."

As Dashing Dave rarely broke a promise or his word, it was evident he would work mischief in the home of the McKenzies. He had no respect for persons; he was naturally evil at heart, and always ill-at-ease when he was not meddling with the business of other people.

Why he was at the head of the Deadwood Regulators, working in the defense of justice and civil rights, was a mystery even to himself, for certainly in spirit he was beneath the notice of all decent men.

That evening he procured a handsome bouquet of choice flowers, and sent it to the cottage by a young Indian lad, whom he had taken into his employ. Of course there came no answer; indeed, the evil schemer expected none—not yet.

He argued that it takes time to work miracles; and if he wished to have success he must not hurry matters. He was aware that Anita knew nothing of his being the sender; therefore how was she to reciprocate?

On the following morning and evening two more choice floral offerings found their way to the McKenzie cottage, and the latter one contained a delicately perfumed note, couched in the following manner:

"DEAR MRS. MCKENZIE: Charmed not only with your beauty of face and form, but with your purity, goodness, and grace, and well-knowing the shameful falsity of your husband, I take this mode of forming your valuable acquaintance, trusting you will not deem me bold."

"If you will grant me a single interview, it will afford me the greatest pleasure, and I shall be enabled to prove to you, that in clinging to Justin McKenzie for a husband, you are fostering a base, ungrateful wretch—a hardened ingrate and a polygamist."

"Respectfully yours,

"DASHING DAVE."

The chief of the Regulators had scarcely expected a reply, yet he was highly elated at his success when his Indian messenger brought him back the following, written in a neat feminine hand:

"To-night, beneath the tree where my brother was hung, at eight."

ANITA."

"Ha! this certainly savors of victory," ejaculated the schemer, triumphantly. "My dart has entered her heart, and now we will see where the fun comes in. Under the tree where her brother was hung. Ugh! what if Deadwood Dick should protrude his haunting visage from one of the branches? Bah! I am getting cowardly. I'll take down a few horns of mountain dew, and hide myself to the trysting-place that I may be in time."

He accordingly entered the Metropolitan, and drank several glasses of poison at the bar, after which he lit a cigar, looked to his weapons, and quitted the saloon en route for the appointed meeting beneath the gallows-tree.

The night was intensely dark, the face of the heavens being overcast with skurrying black clouds, through which the moon peeped at long intervals only to disappear again and leave a deeper gloom. A strong current of wind swept fiercely down through Deadwood gulch, making weird music around the eaves and chimneys of the scattered buildings. Not nearly so many people were out, to-night, as commonly thronged the busy streets, and Dashing Dave found the neighborhood of the gallows-tree quite deserted. It was rather a lonely place, especially upon a dark stormy night, as this threatened to be, for already a few drops of rain had fallen. The nearest habitation was a hundred rods distant, unless it be the cottage before which loomed the tree, and that was untenanted.

"Danged if I admire the location," growled the Regulator, glancing about him, uneasily. "I cannot see what made the fool appoint this place. There's four men swung under this tree, and their combined spirits ought to be sufficient to haunt it. Hello!"

This latter exclamation emanated from a discovery made, as he passed close to the trunk of the tree. It was a white sheet, wrapped around the tree, evidently intended to frighten passers-by.

What else could it be for?

"Ha! ha!" chuckled the Regulator, growing bolder where at first he had been considerably frightened. "Rather a thin ghost, that; but, then, ghosts are naturally supposed to be thin. I wonder who put up this job to scare folks?"

Just then there was a step close at hand, and turning quickly Dashing Dave saw a dark figure coming up through the gloom. It stopped when within about twenty yards, and remained motionless, and he perceived that it was a man mounted upon a powerful black horse.

Instantly a cold chill of terror attacked the Regulator, and he trembled in his moccasins. What did it mean?

Was this—Deadwood Dick?

It was a thought truly horrifying to the former executioner of the road-agent. He was loth to believe in anything that tended toward superstition; yet what was this weird, motionless thing that made him so quake with an uncontrollable fear?

The wind howled mournfully through the leafy coverts of the gallows-tree; the skurrying clouds parted now and then to let a short bolt of ghostly moonlight descend down athwart the earth.

And it dwelt with startling distinctness upon the two motionless figures—the speechless, terrified Regulator, and that thing upon horseback that was the cause of his affright.

Was it an apparition? The spirit of the lynched outlaw returned to earth? Or was it some member of the notorious band, mounted upon their leader's horse, and come back to frighten the citizens of Deadwood into the belief that the ghost of Deadwood Dick was abroad?

These were the questions demanding a solution, yet Dashing Dave was not able to furnish it. He stood rooted to the spot, powerless to move, his eyes protruding, his form trembling and teeth chattering as though with age.

"'Tis his ghost!" he muttered, whitening the longer he gazed at the strange apparition. "It has seen me and is watching me. Curses! why did I ever come here alone? What, in God's name, shall I do?"

Nothing answered his question, unless maybe it was the laughing voice of the wind in among the branches of the tree, above.

But, hark! there are footsteps approaching—footsteps soft and stealthy, it seems; then gradually a circle of dark shadowy forms are outlined, through the gloom—draw closer and closer, until the Regulator is in the immediate presence of a score of masked men. They are real men, too, for he feels their iron clutch upon his shoulder; he is thrown to the ground and bound hand and foot.

Then comes forward that man on the back of the powerful black steed.

It is Deadwood Dick—or, is it his spirit? Which-ever, 'tis the same erect iron frame, clad in jet-colored buck-skin; with black gloves upon the hands, and black trappings for the fiery steed. A chill of horror attacks the Regulator, and he glares helplessly at the phantom leader, for, despite his better reason, he is convinced that he is in the presence of the departed spirit of Deadwood Dick. Indeed, how can it be otherwise?

He was bound and gagged, securely; he was powerless to do or say aught in defense of himself; he could do nothing but watch and wait in an actual fear, that was more tormenting to him than the most acute bodily pain.

The road-agents are grouped around, looking dark and grim, but they speak not. Neither does the object on horseback. Save the humming of the wind through the gallows-tree, all is quiet for a long period; then a blood-curdling burst of laughter from the phantom rings out, and his men start, ready to obey his commands.

He does not speak—phantoms rarely do—but raises one black gauntleted hand and points to the Regulator, then lets it fall again to his side. One of the road-agents now produces a small covered iron pail which, when opened, proves to hold a bed of glowing coals.

By the aid of a pair of tongs, there is taken from the fire a red-hot piece of iron, shaped like a double dagger, and pressed heavily upon the forehead of Dashing Dave.

There is a hissing, sputtering sound, a sickening

stench of burning flesh; a writhing of the prisoner, accompanied by piteous groans, that only excessive pain could cause; then the burning brand is removed and the man who applied it, speaks:

"Thus be it that the first brand toward vengeance is burnt. David Gorgon, you are now in the presence of the living followers of Deadwood Dick, whom you executed upon this spot. Upon yonder horse is what is left of our gallant leader, and his death we owe to you. As he swung, so shall you swing, with our curses upon you."

As he finished speaking a rope was produced, and one end of it noosed about the Regulator's neck. The other end was then tossed up over an overhanging limb, and a dozen pairs of hands pulled the doomed Regulator up into the air.

We will not dwell upon the scene. Suffice it to say that the death-struggles were terrible to witness, and some of the avengers turned aside their heads to shut out the sight. And when it was all over, and the body hung limp and lifeless, a sheet of paper covered with writing, whose ink was *human blood*, was pinned to the clothing of the suspended corpse, after which horses were led forward for the road-agents to mount, and in a wild, weird cavalcade they tore madly down through Deadwood's magic city, their score of voices blending together in a jolly mountain song, that aroused the slumbering echoes—that called forth Deadwood's wakeful population to gaze in awe, wonder and consternation at the startling spectacle.

And high above the chorus of song would occasionally ring out an awful, wild, blood-curdling peal of laughter, from a black figure on horseback, leading a few yards in advance of the main band, and gazing at it the astonished lookers-on could utter but the one opinion:

"The Deadwood Dick, and his jolly dogs!"

It was a scene not new to Deadwood and its population, who had witnessed the wild dash of the dare-devil road-agents more than once through their city; and though attempts had been made for a capture, they had always been made in vain.

The body of Dashing Dave was found swinging beneath the fatal gallows-tree, on the following morning, and pinned to his clothing was a paper containing the following words, *written with crimson gore*:

"NOTICE:—Though life may become extinct from the body, the spirit never dies, and know ye, one and all, that this world has not seen the last of the man who swung beneath this tree, a few nights ago. The following is

DEADWOOD DICK'S VOW OF VENGEANCE:

"As sure as there is a God in Heaven to witness this oath, will Deadwood Dick cause the death of the ten men who laid hold of the rope that jerked him into eternity. Also, will he end the career of Dashing Dave, and of as many more as shall hereafter seek to oppose the Phantom Avenger and his faithful band. Look out for the sign of the double daggers! Dashing Dave heads the list, and there are ten more to follow him.

By request of

"DEADWOOD DICK."

That was all, but it was sufficient to set Deadwood wild with excitement. Very few were there, superstitious or otherwise, who did not believe the oath of vengeance was meant to be executed, and by this weird thing that claimed to be the spirit of the dead road-agent.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIEND LOST—A FRIEND GAINED.

UNDER the deadly fire of Black Harper's revolver, poor Johnson dropped to the ground without a yell or a groan, for the bullet had penetrated the brain and killed him almost instantly. As she saw her brave protector fall, Leone uttered a cry of pain and indignation; her hand flew to her girdle, and the next moment she had covered the outlaw with her own gleaming weapon. But he did not seem to sense any danger in the action, for he laughed, mockingly.

"Blaze away, my pretty!" he taunted, lowering his own weapon, and replacing the fired cartridge with a loaded one. "I'll bet the dirtiest pair o' socks in my collection, that you can't hit me; besides, I'm said to be literally bullet-proof. Go ahead, wi' your ark, if you imagine them little pills in your pop-gun will do me any pertickler harm."

Leone, however, did not fire. She was dumbfounded at the man's reckless coolness; there was a lack of power in her forefinger to pull the trigger. She now trembled for her safety, for how could she ever hope to contend with a man of nearly twice her size and strength? Poor Johnson lay, a stiffening corpse, at her feet, and she could not depend upon him for protection; then how was she to defend herself against this man whose intentions could be none but evil?

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, riding a little nearer, a devilish jubilation in his tone. "So the little bird hesitates, eh? She sees 'tain't no use o' gettin' angry at nothin', I guess. That's the way to do. The tender sex should allus acquiesce to ther infinitely superior judgment of the sterner creation, an' then I will go slick an' clean. Thunder! I b'lieve ye're the purtiest piece of Eve's Rib that 'twar ever my fortune to behold, and if you don't become Mrs. Black Harper afore another sunset, you can call me a labeled liar, an' 'thar's no one's skin call Black Harper a liar and live."

"No! I'll never become your wife, you base wretch!" cried Leone, indignantly, her eyes flashing fire. "I would rather die a thousand deaths!"

"Can't help what you'd rather do, my deary. You hain't got no choice in this matter. Just open your ears and I'll give ye an 'jee o' how things stand. I am the Honorable Black Harper, and, as that nig-

ger remarked, a bit ago, one o' the wust o' cusses, this side o' Tophet. I command a gang of as jolly chaps as can be found in the Hills, whose only care is to plunder, rob, slit weazands and digest liquid speerits, and am a gentleman noted for unequalled cruelty, hard-heartedness and meanness. A meaner man than I you'll have hard work to find in all the States."

"I believe you, there," retorted Leone.

"Thank ye. I consider yer belief a compliment, my blooming bricktop. Now, then, what I want, is a lovely female to adorn my ranch, and I reckon there hain't a likelier one than you in the hull Black Hills country. So it are naturally devolvent upon ye to fill the desired place. I once had a woman to tend ranch for me, but she got sassy, and her grave 's up here in the gulch, a bit of a ways."

Leone shuddered at the ruffian's brutal hint. He was a murderer, then, as well as a thief and an outlaw.

What should she do? If she turned to flee he would certainly pursue and overtake her. If she should attempt to shoot him, would it have any effect? He had said he was bullet-proof. Was any man bullet-proof?

Alas! with her limited knowledge of men of the wild West and warfare with such men, Leone could not tell.

But a sudden thought struck her. She could at least shoot down his horse, and risk a foot-race with him.

It would be a brutal act to thus kill a helpless dumb beast, but it meant liberty—everything to her. To get away from this ruffian, she just then was confident she could shoot down a score of men.

With the revolver she was an unerring shot. Since their flight, Johnson had daily instructed her in the use of firearms—poor Johnson, who now lay dead and forever speechless at her feet.

Too, she was a swift runner. On the dear old Texas plantation where she had been raised, she had daily practiced with the harum-scarum daughter of a neighboring planter, and come off generally the best.

"I am waiting for you to go!" she said, speaking with as much coolness as was possible under the circumstances, her revolver coming to a level with her gaze. "I shall not wait more than about two seconds for you to pucker up!"—using a common border expression by way of giving emphasis, and a business-like tone to her words.

But the outlaw only laughed, as he had before. He seemed to take delight in keeping her in suspense—in watching her as the hawk watches its prey as the wary bird hovers nigh.

"Blaze away, my sweetest ducky!" he chuckled, triumphantly. "I'm willing to risk the consequences;" and while speaking he dropped a thick hide visor over his face. "Now, there's only one place ye can reach, an' 'thar's through the eye-holes, an' I'll bet the dirtiest socks in my collection ye can't touch me!"

Leone pulled the hammer of her revolver back to full-cock, decisively.

"One!" she counted, her tone full of assurance that she meant business.

"Two!" after a slight pause. "Come! if you wish to save yourself, this is the last chance!"

But Black Harper made no motion to move. He gazed at the young girl in cool admiration, verging on indifference.

"THREE!" There was a sharp report, a bright flash in the black night, a shrill scream of pain; then Leone turned and sped down the gloomy canyon with the swiftness of an arrow.

With a dying groan the powerful steed of the outlaw pitched forward, head-foremost, hurling its unsuspecting rider heavily against a boulder, and rendering him momentarily insensible. But not long. Soon he was upon his feet, with the blood flowing from a gash in his swarthy cheek, and comprehending the situation at a glance, he uttered a frightful oath, and bounded away in hot pursuit, howling vile curses each moment after the cause of his disaster. Least of all his expectations had been to be thus outwitted by a young girl, and she, too, comparatively unskilled in border warfare.

Down the canyon several hundred rods in advance, sped Leone, with the fleetness of a frightened hare, exerting every power to keep ahead of her pursuer, who now came leaping fiercely after her.

His oaths did not intimidate her, for she had often heard such language before; it was only the fact that she was alone and had no friends to appeal to for protection, that made her fear.

On—on—on; the moon now came to her aid, and lighted the path for her through the rough canyon; the tall half-naked pines on either side upon the lights looked like grim ghostly specters as reflected in the white moonlight. Save the occasional bark of a mountain wolf, nothing was heard but the loudly echoing footsteps of the pursuer and pursued.

Black Harper, unhorsed, was a man of great bulk, with ponderous limbs, and giant muscles, and in a foot-race was decidedly not in his element. He was a daring, reckless rider, but entirely too bulky to depend upon his legs for locomotion. Therefore, instead of gaining upon Leone, she gained upon him, almost every step taking her further out of his reach, which of course only added to his chagrin and terrible rage.

"Hold up, cuss you!" he yelled, panting and puffing like a steam-engine as he continued the strange race; "hold up, I say, or I'll put a dozen bullets into ye."

Leone glanced back over her shoulder, and measured the intervening distance with her eagle eye. Then she sent back a shrill laugh of defiance, for she saw that no bullet could ever reach her until she was

nearer to the outlaw, and that would probably never be, for he was rapidly losing ground.

On—on; just ahead was the gap where the transverse canyons were crossed by the larger main one; up this her enemies had gone scarcely an hour before, in search of her and Johnson. She could not go in that direction; either she must follow up the other smaller canyon, or the other part of the main one, which would take her back to Deadwood, over the route she and Johnson had come.

Of the two she concluded to take the smaller, preferring not to show herself in Deadwood, until she was forced to go there in quest of food.

On—on—on; she darted out of the mouth of the one canyon, across the main gulch, and into the other, which was much narrower, deeper and darker.

She did not pause, but sped swiftly on, her breath coming and going in quick gasps, showing that her endurance, though remarkable, was nearly exhausted.

How long she would have continued her flight is not for us to say, had not something occurred to check it.

Suddenly and without the least warning a figure stepped from behind a tree, a few yards ahead of her, and blocked her path, not only in a commanding form, but also with a pair of Colt's Navy sixes, that gleamed in the overhanging moonshine like polished silver.

Leone uttered a cry of consternation and stopped stock-still.

"Who are you?" she demanded, trembling, with fear and apprehension.

"Just the question I was about to ask; who are you?" replied a pleasant voice, which sounded somewhat feminine, for all the speaker was clad in male attire—a neatly-fitting suit of tanned buck-skin, fringed and ornamented with Indian beadwork; leggings and moccasins likewise, and a hat of the jockey order perched upon the head.

The form was plump and graceful; the face not really handsome; yet a rough and dissipated career had not altogether

"Swept away the lines where beauty lingers."

A great cloud of raven-hair swept to a waist of fine proportions; the eyes were black as midnight; the mouth stern and decisive.

Leone's fears subsided somewhat when she glanced over her new foe, and listened to the words uttered.

"I asked first; you should answer first!" she replied, stepping a little nearer that she might better view the stranger.

"Right you are. I am a woman, like yourself, young lady, though my dress would argue different. It is an eccentricity of my own, and it matters not to any one the whys and wherefores. I am called throughout the Black Hills, Calamity Jane, and have very few friends—for the simple reason I don't want many. But, how is it that you, a girl unused to roughing it, are wandering about, here, alone by yourself?"

"That is a secret of my own," replied Leone, not caring to be too trusting with an utter stranger. "Enough is it for you to know that I have come here to escape enemies, who have been pursuing me—are, even now, searching for me."

"The deuce, you say!" Calamity Jane thrust her revolvers in her belt, and came nearer. "Then you've come to precisely the right gal for protection, my dear. Here's what's always on hand to protect the weak and oppressed. From now on you can count Calamity Jane as your right bower in everything."

"Thank you," and Leone gratefully seized the hand of her new-made friend, which was as soft and white as her own. "I will gladly accept of your friendship, for I am all alone, my last friend, except God, having been killed but a few moments ago."

"Yes; I heard a couple of pistol-shots up the branch gulch," assented Calamity, "and slid over in this direction to see what was the rumpus. But I heard you comin', so I played hide-an'-coop ahind a tree, till you showed your hand. Reckon I might 'a' socked it to ye, dolorous, if I had spied out that you were a female, like myself."

"You mean you would have shot me?"

"Yes—that's about the size of it."

"And why, pray?"

"Because no one don't go up this gulch an' go back again, except me and my pardner—that's why!"

Leone failed to comprehend the explanation, but she did not say so. Her thoughts reverted to her enemy, Black Harper, and she cast a startled glance behind her. Calamity Jane also glanced keenly down the canyon.

"Was any one following you, when I stopped your flight?" she demanded, her hand resting upon her heroine's shoulder, her coal-black eyes growing sharper—more penetrating.

"Yes," acknowledged Leone, fearful lest the confession should anger the eccentric girl. "I was chased by a ruffian, whom I encountered in trying to elude my other enemies. He shot down my companion, a colore! man, and we tried a foot-race. As you see, I came out ahead."

Calamity's eyes sparkled.

"You're a brick!" she vowed, forcibly emphasizing the declaration by giving the narrator a slap upon the shoulder. "I can make a man of you, if you give me time. Doubtless your vanquished enemy is even now at the forks of the gulch, pondering over which course to take. Did you get his royal nibs?"

"His what?" asked Leone, amazed.

"His royal nibs—his handle—that is, I mean, his name?"

"Oh! yes. He called himself Black Harper."

Calamity Jane uttered something suspiciously like an oath, leaped back, her teeth hard set.

"The devil!" she ejaculated; "you don't mean it!"

"Mean what?"

"That you saw Black Harper?"

"I saw a man who called himself that," replied Leone, wondering why the name so aroused her eccentric friend. "Do you know him?"

"Do I? well, I reckon!" with a wild, strange laugh, unpleasant to hear.

"Black Harper has got a name pretty high as notorious as Deadwood Dick had. Poor Dick! he had to soar aloft, just when he was in the acme of his success. They say his spirit is abroad, though; but I don't believe it. Poor fellow. Yes, I know this Black Harper; guess so. That ain't his only 'cog,' not by a long pill. Down in Deadwood they call him Chet Diamond, the card king. Can hide three tricks in his sleeve, and not half try. See that black mark what covers his forehead? Well, he got that last fourth of July night, when he was a-cussin' his God and Maker enough to make your hair raise, up at Elizabeth City. 'Twarn't astormy night, either, for the stars were out an' the moon shone; but all of a sudden there was a roar of thunder, a fearful glare of lightning, and Diamond went down, head over heels. When they picked him up that black forehead was first seen, and they considered it a hard slap from God's indelible hand. No pain accompanied it, though, they say.

"Up in Yankton, Dakota, the sheriff wants Harper under the name of Bloody Ben, for hoss-steal-in'. In Custer, he's Jim Murdock, an' at Cheyenne several of the law-slingers would like to renew his acquaintance as the Bullet-Chawer. Yes, I know him—he's the fellow who—who— but never mind that; you'll hear about it some other time. Come, let's strike for camp!"

CHAPTER VI. GOLDEN BAR.

So saying, Calamity Jane led the way rapidly up the gulch, the grade ascending for about a mile, then descending almost precipitously, when they found themselves in what was more like a deep, narrow trough in the mountain, half a foot of water everywhere covering the bottom.

"We'll have to wade here," Calamity explained, in answer to Leone's blank look of astonishment. "Don't be afraid. A little stagnant water won't hurt you, for you can dry your feet when you get to the Golden Bar."

"Where's that?"

"On ahead, about three miles. It's my camp, and unknown to any one else, save myself and pardner. You will be the third one initiated into the secret. Can you work?"

"Yes, at some things. It depends altogether as to the nature of the labor."

"Correct. I guess I can make you do. If you can wash sand, there's a snug little fortune awaiting you at Golden Bar."

"But, how about Black Harper? Are you not afraid that he will follow us?"

"No! He'd 'a' been along while we were a-stand-in' back yonder, if he'd 'a' took this gulch."

They waded through the "trough," for the distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile; then the canyon ascended a trifle, turned its course abruptly, and suddenly ended in the face of a giant mountain of gray rock.

A round, black hole was the only mode disclosed of furthering progress, it opening into what appeared to be an inter-mountain cavern.

"This is the entrance to Golden Bar," announced Calamity, stepping into the forbidding entrance, and motioning her companion to follow. "Don't be afraid, for there's nothing here to hurt you, while I'm around."

"Is it a cave?" questioned Leone, doubtful about being led unwittingly into the bowels of the mountains.

"Yes—or, rather, an immense subterranean vault, of which only one person, aside from you and I and my pardner, has the least knowledge. Its floors are rich with gold-bearing sands, a bar of which we have worked for the last month with big success. Plenty of water runs through the cavern, providing us with means by which to wash out our wealth. Come, let's enter."

They went in through the black hole and found themselves in Stygian darkness. Not long, however, Calamity gave four shrill, distinct whistles; then seized Leone by the arm and hurried on, their feet sinking an inch deep into a fine sandy bottom. Presently their hearing was greeted with the savage growling of several dogs, which caused Leone to tremble in alarm.

"They won't hurt you," Calamity observed, reassuringly. "They are chained."

At this instant a flood of dazzling light was poured upon them from a bull's-eye lantern, held in the hand of a man standing several yards away, his other hand clutching a cocked revolver.

"It's only me, Don," the young woman cried; then down went the weapon and the man rapidly advanced.

"You, Jennie," he said, gladness in his tone. "Welcome to Golden Bar! Hello! who's this you have with you?"

"A wail I picked up, back yonder near the Forks. Isn't she pretty though?"

"Guess so!" echoed the partner, turning the light of the bull's-eye full upon Leone, and glancing her over, admiringly. "Pretty as a picture, by Jove. What's her name, and where did she come from, to be caught roaming wild, out here in the Black Hills?"

"My name is Leone," replied she, flushing a trifle under the man's persistent gaze. "I have come all

the way from Texas, chased by enemies. That is all I care to tell at present."

"That is enough," said Calamity, decisively. "So long's you're a good square pard, that's all we care. Allow me to introduce to you Mr. Donald Yates, my pardner in the Golden Bar mines."

Leone acknowledged the introduction with a plain little courtesy.

Mr. Donald Yates was a young man in years, his age probably not exceeding one-and-twenty. In form he was rather above the average height, yet muscularly developed and well-proportioned. In face he was at once strikingly handsome, the features being perfect and genial, the mouth expressive of humor; the eyes, sharp, of a light-brown color; the straight Indian hair and imperial, of the same hue.

His dress consisted of tanned deer-skin trousers, thrust at the knees into the legs of a pair of high leather boots; a loose velvet blouse and a Spanish sombrero, looped up to one side with a gold arrow-pin. He also wore what is in the Black Hills very rarely encountered—a "boiled" white shirt, in the bosom of which gleamed a cluster diamond-pin! A single pistol was in his belt, but this was a seven-shot, and of elegant finish. Altogether Mr. Yates was a man of prepossessing personal appearance, and one with whom a person would not care to trifle, to judge by his muscles, and the coming and going steely glitter in his penetrating eye—handsome eyes they were, truly.

The introduction made, Calamity said:

"I have taken in this young lady, pardner, as one of us. She can wash sand as good as you or I, and what she makes let her keep. Do you say so?"

"Of course. There is plenty of gold here for all of us—more than we shall ever live to pan out, I fear. Come! let's get into camp, for I left some fresh venison roasting, and if it should burn we would be defrauded of our supper."

"Yes," assented Leone, laughing merrily, for she now felt somewhat at home. "If there is any prospect for a square meal, let's go on, for I haven't had a morsel since yesterday morning."

Accordingly young Yates led the way, and they tramped on over the level sand-bar that constituted the floor of the mammoth cavern. It was a wonderful place to Leone, with its great width and length and aerial ceilings, from which hung stalactites of every imaginable size, and not unfrequently very grotesque in form.

Presently they suddenly rounded a projection in the rocky wall, and found themselves before a bright fire of cones, over which was roasting a savory piece of venison. A pot of fragrant coffee was steeping on a bed of coals; near the fire was a rude table set with dishes, and looking quite inviting—especially to Leone.

A few stools, a collection of mining implements, and an array of weapons from the rifle down to the knife and cartridge-belt, hung upon the wall.

"There! this is the city of Golden Bar," laughed Calamity Jane, as she gave the fire a nudge with her foot—a very dainty foot, by the way—and pointed Leone to a chair, or stool. "Off yonder in the darkness, where you hear the dash of water, is our present place of labor."

It all seemed wild and strange to Leone, yet she secretly liked it. Her young spirit craved for something new and exciting, and now she had it.

Donald finished the roasting of the meat, then with a familiar hand arranged the supper.

It consisted of the venison, done to a nicety; coffee, and hardtack biscuits, and some fresh crackers that had been purchased in Deadwood. Not a very dainty meal to be sure; yet it was substantial, and that was what the appetite of the trio most craved.

"Were you in Deadwood, to-day, Jennie?" Yates asked, after having finished a huge slice of meat.

"I reckon!" was the laconic reply.

"Thought so. Any new?"

"None scarcely worth mentioning. Oh! yes, there is, too. Deadwood Dick's feller has strung up Dashing Dave!"

"The deuce, you say!"

"Yes—the Regulators found their blowin' chief swingin' beneath the same tree they stretched Dick from, this mornin'. An' last night, they say, the gang made a spurt up through town, an' there at their head, ridin' for kill and yellin' like a loony, was Deadwood Dick, himself—black hoss, black rider and all!"

Yates laughed, sarcastically.

"What nonsense!" he said, quietly. "Are they trying to make out that it's his spook, or what?—for certainly it cannot be aught else, as Deadwood Dick was hung till there wasn't a breath of life in him. I'll vouch for that."

"Reckon it's his spoor, then," replied Calamity, the firelight playing over her features and revealing rather a grim expression upon them. "Dick was a cuss, an' no mistake, an' 'twere a pity he got suspended; but the Lord forbid I should ever meet his spook."

"Would it scare you?" with a laugh.

"I reckon. I'm not partial to anything of the spiritual order. Once they had a ghost up in Virginia City. I was a young dare-devil of a gal, then, and led a band of fellows down against the old ranch where the animal held out. Hanged if we all out! But, that wasn't the worst of the matter, though."

"I got a buzzer from a Spencer rifle, just back o' the ear, and one o' the band, Sam Alman by name, got tickled to death under the fifth rib, with a mate to it. After that you can bet we didn't trouble his ghostship for a cent."

The fire burned low as the trio sat before it; the surrounding shadows seemed to form into grotesque figures; a hushed silence followed in the wake of the ended conversation.

Donald Yates sat staring steadfastly into the flames, his elbows resting upon his knees, and hands supporting his chin.

He seems to be thinking very intently upon some subject, evidently a pleasant one, for his eyes occasionally light up with warmth and animation.

Leone is reviewing her past career up to present date, as she watches the queer formations in the glowing coals, imagining she can trace and decipher mountains steep and declivitous; narrow, winding valleys; cities that look as if they had been overturned by the restless roll of an earthquake; forests and cascades—and almost everything conceivable.

Calamity Jane is watching her two companions, and studying them with a careful observance that is characteristic of her. In Leone she sees a pure, true, confiding maiden, little versed in the wickedness of the world.

In Yates, a man of the world beyond his years; a brave, cool, reckless, determined fellow, rarely to be caught napping; always pleasant to friends, and cold toward enemies; stern and unforgiving in his hates—warm and passionate in his loves. Of all men, the eccentric girl thought she would choose him; but bah! that old rankling recollection comes back, and makes her almost despise and curse the race of men.

"How much did you pan to-day, Don?" she asked, breaking the silence, in order to dispel her own bitter thoughts.

"Yesterday, I panned about five ounces; it is now another day, you will remember!" he replied, glancing at the face of an elegant watch. "If we intend to get any sleep, it's about time we turned in."

To which a general assent was given.

The young man rolled himself up in a large Mexican blanket and lay down near the fire, while Calamity led the way off into the darkness where more blankets were piled upon a bed of leaves and sand. Here she and Leone sought slumber, of which the latter was very much in need.

Humble though the couch, the young wanderer found it a relief to lie down and rest, and ere long she was in a sleep, sweet, dreamless and invigorating.

Hours later, a shout from Donald awoke them, and they found breakfast—though it was in reality noon—already awaiting them. To Leone's surprise she found the cavern now flooded with daylight instead of firelight, a large opening at the northern end of the mammoth apartment furnishing it. At the further side of the cavern a foaming torrent of water rushed down from a crevice in the rocky ceiling, rushed by through a well-worn channel, and disappeared through the before-mentioned opening, falling in a silvery sheet into a continuation of the canyon below, which the mountain had choked up and divided from the part out of which the Texan woman had come a few hours previous.*

The light thus entering from the opening was sufficient to make objects distinct to the furthest end of the wonderful inter-mountain apartment.

The grade of the stream flowing through the floor was down-hill, considerably, and in its channel were dextrously arranged a series of sluice-boxes for washing out gold, which was abundant in the sands that formed the bottom of the Golden Bar—one of the richest discoveries, by the way, anywhere in the vicinity of Deadwood.

"Come! come! Your dreams must have been pleasant to have kept you sleeping so long!" said Yates, placing the repast upon the table, while Leone and Calamity made a hasty toilet at the stream.

"I did not dream at all," replied Leone, combing her profusion of brick-red curls. "I was tired enough to sleep all day."

"I don't often sleep so long," remarked Calamity, yawning. "Did you see to my cayuse* and the dogs, Don?"

"Yes, long ago. Why? are you off again to-day? You won't get much gold mined at this rate."

"Bother the gold. I have got ten times as much laid by as I shall ever use. Besides, what am I working for?—who am I hoarding up gold for? I have no one to leave it to when I go up the winding stairs."

"You have relatives in Nevada?"

"Curse them! they'll never get none o' my tin—bet your pile on that. When they kicked me out of doors, it was forever. Ugh! I don't want to talk about it, for I always get savage."

They sat down and partook of the repast in silence, the wronged woman looking grim and stern. Donald Yates also looked grave.

He was, perhaps, more familiar with her history than any one else in all the Black Hills.

She had confidentially told him the whole bitter, terrible story of her life, when one day she met him in the mountains; he had pitied her, and as a result she had initiated him into the secret of the Golden Bar, and made him her partner.

After the meal was dispatched, the strange woman took down her rifle and prepared to quit the cavern. A whistle from her lips brought to her side from a further part of the cavern, a large, iron-framed, savaged-eyed horse of Mexican breed, accompanied by a brace of ferocious-looking dogs, of decided bull-dog paternity.

"You will not be afraid to remain here with Don, will you?" she asked of Leone, as she saddled the horse.

"I—I—guess not," faltered her guest, hardly knowing if she was speaking the truth or not. "How long will you be gone?"

"Only a few hours, probably. You can amuse yourself at washing sand. All you get is yours, to keep."

Then she mounted and galloped away through the

* This description may be readily recognized by any one familiar with the country north-west of Deadwood.—AUTHOR.

† Cayuse.—In the Black Hills is a fiery horse.

cavern, followed by the baying dogs, and disappearing through the black hole by which Leone had first come into the cavern.

After watching her vanish, Leone turned toward where Donald had been standing. But, strangely, he was not there.

He too had disappeared!

CHAPTER VII.

THE "SLOP-BUCKET"—DOUBLE DAGGERS!

AGAIN we return to Deadwood, the chief center of attraction and immigration to the Black Hills placers.

'Tis an hour bordering nigh upon midnight. The streets are thronged with people—an intermingling of miners, who have either come in after supplies, or to have a big drunk—of "citizens," as rough and uncouth-looking as the miners themselves—of "tender-foots," or new arrivals of swearing ruffians and desperadoes—of females who have lost all claims to respectability—of a great, indiscriminate mass, comprising people no doubt honest and upright, and again criminals of the worst class to be found west of the "Mississipp."

Nor are all out in the streets, under the grand illumination of the soaring moon. There are saloons, dance-houses and gaming-hells by the wholesale, and these are crowded to overflowing, and from them emanate hoarse shouts, vile curses, rude lascivious songs, and occasionally yells of pain as some fellow, perhaps, gets a "thump on 'the shell o' phrenology."

Worst among its bad class, combining saloon, card-house, dance-house and bagnio, all in one, was a rough, uninviting shanty of huge dimensions, doing a thriving business despite its name—

"THE SLOP-BUCKET."

The proprietor made a truthful hit, when he first christened his establishment thus, for the drinks he dealt out were nothing more or less than slops; and the name also drew in the roughest classes that could not find enough "excitement" at the Metropolitan and other similar places of its character. The "Slop-Bucket" was literally a hot-bed of vice and rankst infamy, and none but the lowest of the low frequented it—even the common "toughs" considering it below their mark.

Yet we have chosen to visit the place, to introduce a new scene into our drama, taking care to omit the mention of such features as we would consider objectionable for pen to dwell upon.

It is midnight, when we enter—and it is doubtful if at this hour there are a score of people in all Deadwood that are in bed and asleep. Everybody seems up and busy, and fully as wide awake as in the daytime. In this delectable magic city of the Black Hills, sleep, for the most part, is obtained from three to five A. M., and five to half-past seven P. M.

For the predominating class a very meager allowance of poor whisky seems to answer all demands for rest, unless occasionally time is taken to store away a limited meal.

In the "Slop-Bucket," all is "red-hot" as we enter its grimy portals.

It is the same old story, only conducted in a rougher, more obscene manner;—dancing here, drinking there; gambling in this place, fighting in that; singing, swearing and blaspheming, most revolting and horrible to hear.

A tumbledown stage in one corner, before which an orchestra of a banjo and fiddle makes terrible attempts to produce music, contains the attraction of the evening, as the posters on every side—*Pioneer print—announce, in the person of "Silver Sal," "The Bossest of all Boss Gals!"*

We have no power to give her a correct description; nor would we soil these pages even with the attempt. Let us simply call her a fat, coarse young woman, dissipated and ribald, and let the matter drop. The vicious songs are greeted with wildest enthusiasm by the brutal audience, and no sooner do they cease than a dozen glasses of beer are passed to the stage over the footlights, out of which the songstress selects one to drink, and kicks the others far out among the crowd, an act, by the way, that is received with loud shouts of approbation.

Seated at a table in one of the quietest corners of the saloon, and watching the scene with an expression of disgust depicted upon his handsome features, was a young man of about twenty years, who seemed out of place in the God-forsaken audience. He sat alone by his table, minding his own business; yet this did not prevent his becoming the center of many curious glances, and some broad hints questioning his right there, were thrown out, loud enough to reach his hearing. But, this did not seem to disconcert him in the least. He was quite cool, and regardless of danger, if danger was to be inferred from the glances leveled at him, and did not give the crowd's rude remarks the slightest attention, apparently.

In many respects he was a remarkable young man. Remarkably handsome in face and feature was he; his hair was of a chestnut hue, and worn long down over his shoulders; his eyes were brown, yet with power to gleam dangerously, at times; his mouth stern and overshadowed by a youthful mustache. In form, he was straight and well-cast, his limbs like bars of iron in their hardness; his shoulders broad and powerful; his bearing upright, and a trifle haughty.

Most singular of all, however, was his costume, which would have attracted special notice in any crowd. The breeches were of buffalo-skin, with the fur left outward; the moccasins small and neatly embroidered in fantastic shapes; a velvet vest, and a buffalo-skin coat, like the breeches, completed the outfit, unless it be the beaver cap upon his head.

Around the waist was belted a horn-handled knife—an eighteen "incher," by the way—and a pair of

gold-mounted revolvers, which looked as if they had seen a good deal of service, though they were as yet nearly as good as new. A lasso slung to the back, and an Evans repeating rifle leaning against the table, bespoke the fact that the young stranger was no miner, but fresh from the hunting-grounds of the far North-west.

"That's Buffalo Ben—heerd of him, 'ain't ye?" one of the crowd, a burly Montanian, asked, scowling at the object of his remark. "He's some on the shoot, they say, an' ar' down from nigh t' the British line."

"What the devil do he want hyar?" responded the individual addressed. "We don't want no Britishers in this consarn, not if ole Minnesota Mike ar' dreamin' correct. I say, young feller, w'at d'ye suspect ye're doin' round hyar, anyhow?"

"It appears to me that I'm mindin' my own business," replied Buffalo Ben, quietly, "and I beg to mention that it would be advisable for you and your crowd to follow suit. I don't wish to pick a quarrel with you, but ye've got to mind your own business—that's all!" And the tone of the young man was decidedly positive.

"Is that all?" sneered the Minnesotian, mockingly, as he strode nearer. "Young feller, do you know what I can do? Why, I can just chaw your ear off in one second by the watch, roast me if I can't."

"I haven't the least doubt about it," retorted Ben, coolly, evading his giant insulter, indifferently. "I've met wild beasts in my time that could chaw down a man without winking. It must be that you belong to that ferocious order!"

The rough uttered a curse, and a snarl like an enraged bull.

And a general laugh went up from the nearest bystanders who had overheard the conversation.

"You had better move on," added Buffalo Ben, drawing one of his polished revolvers, cocked and ready for instant use. "I don't feel in a talkative mood to-night; but if you'll come around some other time, we'll converse. If there is need for any further words, on my part, this evening, I'll let this speak for me!" and he indicated what he meant by a nod at the grim six-shooter.

The Minnesotian glared at his cool adversary in rage and astonishment. He had little expected to see such an exhibition of "nerve" from one who appeared to be simply a youth. He was one of the Deadwood Regulators, as was his companion, the Montanian, and had been a domineering, bullying fellow from boyhood up. But very rarely had he, in all his eventful experience, encountered any one who dared to brave him as the young frontiersman had done.

"You'd better leave him be, Mike!" argued the Montanian, endeavoring to pull the offended giant away. "Come! let's go an' imbibe!"

"All right," accepted the Minnesotian, with alacrity. "I never refuse pizen, Deer-Foot; but arter'ds won't I lay out that young whelp? I reckon!"

And he shook his huge fist at Buffalo Ben, threateningly, as he waltzed off toward the bar for the drinks.

"Now's just your chance to peel out, younker," advised one of the crowd, earnestly, "afere Minnesota Mike gets back, for he's the distilled essence o' h—l, when he gits eight fingers o' corn-juice down him."

"Is that so?" coolly asked the borderer, twisting up a cigarette, and lighting it with the utmost nonchalance. "I don't care if he is, or what he is. I reckon I'm too tired to run for such a looking brute as he, if I know myself."

"And ain't ye afraid that ye'll git hurt?"

"Not the least. Reckon I'll look out for number one, every time."

"Waal, just wait till Mike gits at ye, an' I opine ye'll sing a different tune," was the unheeded warning.

Minnesota Mike did not come back very soon. He evidently found too much attraction around the bar, where the proprietor of the "Slop-Bucket" dealt out perhaps the worst decoctions to be found within the limits of the magic city.

Buffalo Ben sat quietly at his table, watching all that was going on about him. Especially did his eyes linger upon the repulsive songstress, Silver Sal, and a dark frown stole over his features while his teeth shut hard together, as he continued to gaze at her.

First she was on the stage, singing her shameful songs; then she was mingling with the ruffian audience, drinking with whoever offered to stand treat, and swearing in a manner awful to hear, at little or no provocation.

Several times she passed near to where Buffalo Ben sat, and the young man half rose to his feet, his lips parted, as if about to speak; but she pushed on without noticing him, and he resumed his seat, his face growing dark with anger.

"The ill-fates take her!" he muttered, fiercely. "Will I never get an opportunity to speak to the brazen wretch? My God! it makes my blood run cold when I see what a low, shameless thing she is, and realize that Belle is in her power! Curse her! If I ever I get a chance, I'll make life seem dear to her."

But if Silver Sal knew of his presence among the audience she fought shy of him, for her attention was mostly given to another part of the crowd.

After waiting and watching for upward of an hour longer, Buffalo Ben left his seat, and slinging his rifle on his back, sauntered toward the door, intending to seek the street for a little fresh air, the atmosphere in the "Slop-Bucket" being rank and heavy with tobacco-smoke, the odor of very bad whisky, and the vitiated breath of that bad crowd.

But his action was immediately noticed by Minnesota Mike, who was approaching at this juncture,

and he instantly blockaded the way with his burly form—Deer-Foot, his pard, close behind. Both were in liquor, the Montanian, especially, being in more of a fighting mood than he had previously been.

"See hyar, young feller!" began the Minnesotian, a greenish glare coming into his eyes, "we've got a small ham-bone ter pick w' you, afore ye git out o' our glorious palace—just the wee bittest little bone ye ever dreamed of in yer hull life. While ago you called me a dirty, knock-kneed, cross-eyed son-of-a-gun—now, didn't ye?—and my pard, hyar, a wammel-chopped, lantern-jawed hoss-thief, didn't ye?"

"Not that I remember of!" replied Ben, allowing his hand to rest upon the butt of a pistol in his belt. "I rarely call a person undeserved names."

"Ye don't, hey? Ye didn't call us sons-of-guts, an' hoss-thieves, now, did ye, you contemptible little cuss?"

"I called you nothing of the kind, so get out of my path, or I'll do something worse than call names!" was the stern answer, for the young man's blood was rising, and when angry he brooked no trifling. "Come! move aside, or I'll make two corpses here within the next two minutes."

"Will ye, though?" roared the giant, and the next instant he and the Montanian sprung forward, each clutching a long, gleaming knife in hand.

But before they could strike a blow, or even before Buffalo Ben could draw his weapon, there were two sharp reports, and just as a half-score of masked men sprung in through the open casements, the two would-be-fighters tumbled to the floor, without a groan.

Then, high above the din and confusion, rung the cry:

"Clean out the den! Double-daggers and vengeance for Deadwood Dick!"

Yells of horror, rage and consternation arose from the lips of the surprised ruffian audience; curses mingled with pistol-shots; the clashing and ringing of steel, and dying groans, were the ruling sounds of that awful moment.

Bang! bang! bang! went the death-speaking revolvers of the avenging road-agents, each report followed by a vivid flash of flame and a yell of pain. Bang! bang! spoke the weapons of the ruffians in return; and on waged the deadly conflict, unceasingly.

But it soon appeared that the attacked party were getting the worst of it. Already a score of their men were stretched out, while every road-agent still retained his feet, though some were hard hit.

"Douse the glim! out with the light!" yelled the alarmed proprietor of the "Slop-Bucket." And in a twinkling, the whole establishment was in inky darkness. Of course firing now ceased, for friends could not be told from enemies.

Blindly the crowd mingled together, every person on the alert; all expecting to be the recipient of a blow which would renew the battle. After some delay the killed and wounded were dragged to one side, so as not to be trampled on; then, some one more daring than the rest ventured to light a lamp.

In an instant each man scanned his neighbor, expecting to find himself contiguous to an enemy.

But lo! and behold, the road-agents had taken advantage of the darkness to make their escape. It was no use to follow them.

Once more the "Slop-Bucket" puts forth her lights, and then all rush forward to count the victims of the affray.

But ha! what is this they see staring them in the face?

There are a score of dead and dying, and upon the forehead of each, slashed deep, with a keen knife, is that terrible emblem of Deadwood Dick's avowed vengeance—a bloody double dagger!

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOLF IN THE FOLD.

LEONE was considerably alarmed, when she found that Yates was not in sight.

Where had he gone? What was his motive? Had she, after all, been entrapped into this place for some foul purpose?

She grew pale and trembling as she asked herself these questions; then, nerved herself and began a hasty search.

Suddenly, behind a huge boulder that had sometime become dislodged from the ceiling and now lay upon the sandy floor, she came upon the young miner, crouching out of her sight, and laughing quietly to himself.

"Come! this is not kind of you!" she cried, a trifle indignant, "getting me alarmed and excited, because I thought I was left alone in this horrible den. Why did you hide away?"

"Just to see what you would say or do," he replied, laughing heartily at her sulks, as he left his retreat. "Don't get mad, now; 'twas only in fun."

"Well, don't do it again, will you?"

"No; I promise you. Now, come and I'll initiate you into the mysteries of gold-mining, so that you'll be able to earn your three dollars a day, and not half try."

And in this respect he was as good as his word. He taught her how to separate the fine golden particles from the coarser sands by the aid of the sluice-boxes.

And ere long she was able to do as good execution in her work as he. The sand was not hard to get, being loosely packed over the bottom, and it took only a few painful to prove that it abounded richly with gold—and gold, too, that was of a superior quality.

Leone took to mining with a zeal and earnestness that showed she was not afraid to work; and Donald Yates watched her, secretly, admiration beaming from his eyes.

"Just a beauty, is she!" he mused, leaning on his spade, occasionally, to gaze on the handsome face.

and form, busily engaged at the "cradle." "I'd give the world to possess such a prize to keep me company through life. But I doubt if she could be won by such a chap as I. She has a pretty exalted opinion of herself, and mayhap, another lover."

There was where the miner made a mistake. There was nothing proud or vain about Leone; she was quiet, unobtrusive and sociable. She considered every respectable person as good as herself, and envied nobody their good-looks or worldly riches.

She rather admired Yates; she thought she saw in him a man who would make a kind, loving husband: be true and kind, and a faithful partner through life.

But, then, she had never seriously given marriage the least consideration; hitherto, her time had mostly been devoted to her studies, until circumstances caused her flight from the land of her childhood.

"Where did you come from, before you came to the Black Hills?" she asked, working away industriously, that he might not see that she was interested in him.

"From Cheyenne, direct to Deadwood. I was born and reared near Harlem, New York, but since I was fourteen years of age, have been roughing it in nearly every portion of the West."

"Were you ever in Texas?—dear old Tex; the land I love above all others?"

"No. I never got quite so far South, though once I was within fifty miles of the border line. I have hunted in the wilds of Montana, and even into Washington Territory, where the foot of white man seldom treads; played cards by the season in Salt Lake City, with Mormon sharps; and billiards and roulette in San Francisco; have killed Indians here in Dakota, and trapped beaver and otter about the headwaters of the Yellowstone."

"Indeed! Yours seems to have been an eventful experience. Were you ever captured by the Indians?"

"Yes, on several occasions. But the Fates always willed it that I should speedily escape from their clutches."

Thus they worked and conversed, and ere long light ceased to come in through the natural window, and the miner announced that it was night.

"We'll eat supper, now," he said, "and then count up our pile. Yesterday I realized more pure gold than ever before, but shall fall short, to-day, because I spent too much time in watching you."

"Which was your own fault. I did not tell you to stare at me all the time," flashed back Leone.

"I know, my dear lady, but I couldn't help it. You are so charming and beautiful—"

"Ugh! don't!" The girl shrugged her pretty shoulders, and made a wry face. "I'd rather take medicine, any day, than be flattered. And, don't call me your dear lady, again, if you please, because I'm nothing of the kind."

"Ain't you? Well, you must excuse my familiarity," and the miner turned abruptly and stalked away toward the camp-fire, which he had kindled some time before. Leone ran after him, and caught him by the arm.

"You will not be angry with me?" she questioned. "Certainly not!" he replied, looking down at her, half-gloomily; "but you wouldn't give me a chance to—"

"To be familiar on short acquaintance—is that it?" she demanded, roughly.

"Well—yes; perhaps that's it," he confessed, hesitatingly.

"Oh, well, we'll come to be very good friends, in time, I dare say; only don't presume to call me your dear," she rejoined with evident earnestness; then she added: "wait and see what happens. Maybe some one else will come along whom you will like better than myself. Don't you think that a wise suggestion?"

"No. I am positive, in regard to my present predilections. Red-headed girls of your style, don't grow on every bush in the Black Hills."

"Don't they? Well—you needn't be poking fun at my bricky hair, I'm sure. If you keep far enough away from it, it won't burn you. Come! Come! enough of this nonsense. Let us have some supper and, then, as you said, count our gold—the fruits of half a day's labor. I s'pose I've made my fortune, already."

"No doubt of it," replied Yates, dryly, as he stirred up the fire. He was not in the best humor, on account of this evident repulse by his fair companion. He had scarcely anticipated such a rebuff; but it learned him a lesson to be less presuming in the future. Be it said to his credit, it was his first attempt at love advances—the first time in his eventful life, that he had ever felt any tender feeling for the opposite sex.

The supper was soon prepared, out of venison, coffee and crackers, and dispatched in silence. Yates was not in a talkative mood, and Leone did not urge him into conversation. When they were through eating and the table was cleared away, Donald produced a pair of tiny scales, and poured his dainty pile of shining dust into the receiving pan to be weighed.

"Only three ounces!" he announced, after adjusting the weights; "but it is finer gold than usual."

He next brought forth from a niche in the wall a large leathern-pouch, half-filled with something that Leone at once concluded was gold. Into this he poured the gold he had just weighed; then held it all triumphantly aloft.

"It's all gold!" he cried, with enthusiasm—"pure and marketable. At the San Francisco mint it would fetch five thousand dollars in greenbacks, any minute—but I'd rather have the gold, the pure shining stuff that gleams so richly when you look at it. Girl, I could go to Deadwood and gamble that all away in one night; I did do it, once in F'risco. I entered a gambling-hell at seven o'clock, one even-

ing, with six thousand dollars in pocket—the result of a year's hard toil in the Timbuctoo mines—and came out, seven hours later, cleaned of every ounce, and headily drunk in the bargain. That's life and business for you!"

"You were a big fool—that's all I've got to say!" declared Leone, "and served just right."

"Yes, I know; that's what all my sympathizing friends told me. But 'twasn't won fair, but your dust on that, and the rascal what won it got laid out, within the next two weeks."

"Did you kill him?"

"No; certainly not. No white man's blood has ever yet dyed my hands, though I've sent many a red-skin humming across the equator of eternity. The feller got suspended by a band of Vigilantes. Give me your pile, and I'll weigh it."

Accordingly Leone's gold was poured into the pan, in a little yellow heap, and the weights adjusted.

"Five ounces, by hokey!" cried Donald, in surprise, "and that in half a day, too! Why, that is extraordinary, and if you continue in that vein all the while, you'll soon have your fortune made."

"Five ounces; isn't that grand?" cried Leone, in delight. "I had no idea there was half an ounce of the stuff. What shall I do with it?"

"I have another pouch here that is empty; and see! here's Calamity's. It don't weigh as much as mine by several ounces. She don't stick close enough to business to make business profitable. She is rich, though."

"Rich?—who, Calamity Jane?"

"Yes. She's got a good bit of money invested in landed property in Deadwood, and owns three silver-locations up in the Bear Lodge mountain region. Beside all this, she has ten thousand dollars worth o' greenbacks on her person, all the time, and I heard when I was in Deadwood, last, that she had bought out the Metropolitan saloon, root and branch."

A man, who, unknown to either of our friends, was lurking among the black shadows of the cavern, just within hearing, pricked up his ears at the gratuitous information so unwittingly given by the miner.

"The devil!" he ejaculated, under his breath. "So this Calamity Jane carries her tin about her harness, eh? Curse the luck; I wish I'd 'a' known it, this afternoon, for I'd bin apt to 'a' stopped her, when I seed her pass on her buckin' cayuse. Never mind, though, I'll remember w'at I've heard, an' keep an eye out for her in the future. My present business is in this place, an' w' these secret miners. Hang me, if it ain't as purty a posish as ever I seed. I'll get the gal, put the chap out o' the way, an' when Calamity comes back, I'll latch onto her."

This man, with his black forehead and wonderful long, piratical mustache, was none other than Black Harper.

He had seen Leone and Calamity Jane in the transverse canyon, had secretly followed them until they entered the remarkable mountain cavity; then he had secreted himself in the neighborhood to watch. Patience was one of his personal characteristics, and as a result, he waited till he saw Calamity come forth on her horse, and ride away.

He then had stealthily entered the cave, expecting, of course, that Leone had been left alone. But he was astonished to find her under charge of an able protector, and that the cave was in reality, a rich gold field—perhaps the most valuable in all the Black Hills country. Of course he could have dropped young Yates at a shot, and taken Leone captive; but, like a cunning savage, he preferred to wait until they slept; then to surprise them, and make matters easier.

Perhaps if Donald Yates had scented the presence of this lurking wolf in the fold, he would not have been so free in displaying his gold.

"Do you think Calamity Jane will come back to-night?" Leone asked, securing her pouch of precious stuff to her belt.

"That's hard telling," replied Donald, as he threw himself upon a blanket in front of the fire, and filled and lighted his meerschaum. "She may, and she may not—just as it happens. If she gets very much interested in cards and has any luck, you may not see her in a week."

"Then I don't want to stay here!"

"Why not, pray? No one will harm you."

"I'm not so sure about that. How do I know but you are one of the worst villains in existence; and she may be a party to your plot to ruin me? You will remember I am a stranger in the Black Hills, and know nothing of you or your antecedents."

"True; but you need not fear. When you find Donald Yates less than a gentleman, you may believe yourself in danger. Until then please have faith in me, and my ability to protect you."

The ruddy firelight playing over his features, made him look handsomer than ever, stretched as he was at full length, thereby displaying his manly figure to full advantage.

"You might let me love and cherish you," he resumed, after a short silence, his tone coaxing—persuasive. "As man and wife, we could buy off Calamity's claim, and here at Golden Bar we could spend the rest of our days in security and happiness. This cavern could be fitted into an Aladdin's palace, and we would be separated from the world—content and blessed in each other's love."

"If you were an artist, Mr. Yates, and could transfer that verbal picture to canvas, you would no doubt acquire an enviable reputation, and might make your fortune," said Leone, laughing merrily. "There! don't get mad, now; I was only joking. But did you really mean what you said?"

"Of course I did. I rarely say anything I don't mean," he replied, again half-savage because he was fool enough to let her trifle with his feelings.

"Then, don't say what you mean on that subject

again, pray. I have told you, as I thought, very plainly that I didn't want you to get in love with me; neither do I want to fall in love with you; but I shall if you don't hush;—so keep still about it."

"That is just what I want—to have you learn to love me!" he cried, raising himself to a sitting posture, and endeavoring to take her hand, his face flushed and eyes glistening. But she quickly rose and got out of his reach.

"Do go away, Mr. Yates, and let me alone, or I shall scream for help!" she cried, her eyes snapping in their earnestness.

"That would make no difference, were I ungentelemanly enough to persist, as there is no one within miles of this cavern, in all probability," he said, throwing himself upon the blanket once more. "Be seated; I will not be so audacious, again."

And he kept his word. Nothing more was said on the subject—in fact, little or nothing was said during the remainder of the evening, the miner appearing wrapped up in his own thoughts.

When ten o'clock came, and Calamity Jane had not returned, he said:

"You can retire now, if you wish, as Calamity will probably not be in, to-night. I will smoke another pipe, take a turn about the premises, and then take a nap myself."

Leone accordingly sought the couch on which she had lain the previous night, and soon she was fast asleep, the labor of mining having greatly fatigued her.

It must have been long past midnight, when she was startled from her slumber by an intuition of danger, or something, she knew not what, until she gave a terrified glance, and then uttered one piercing shriek of horror as she beheld a human face—the face of a man, with black, scarred forehead, gleaming eyes and a long grizzly mustache, reaching behind his huge ears—bending close to hers, his breath, scented with tobacco and bad whisky fanning her cheek!

She recognized the face in a single instant as that of the outlaw and ruffian, Black Harper!

CHAPTER IX.

DEADWOOD DICK AGAIN—PLAYING FOR STAKES.

BETWEEN midnight and morning of that same night of the road-agents' raid upon the "Slop-Bucket," in Deadwood, the whole band made a grand dash wildly up through the main street, and disappeared in the darkness, leaving behind them their echoing songs and shouts of laughter. And boldly in the lead, black, grim and terrible, rode that thing people said was the ghost of Deadwood Dick, occasionally sending up one of those unearthly shrieks of laughter that had been characteristic of the Prince of the Road, before he was suspended beneath the branches of the gallows-tree.

Early in the following morning, the news of what had happened at the "Slop-Bucket" was spread broadcast through the Magic City, and in all the diggings in the immediate surroundings. Great was the excitement that prevailed, and during the day, the notorious den was thronged with crowds who came to view the dead, and the terrible death-mark of Deadwood Dick.

Of the wounded only one man lived beyond mid-day, but he too expired just as the sun sunk over the hill at eventide.

And thus was Deadwood Dick's Vow of Vengeance executed, in a style that was destined never to be forgotten by the residents of the mining city of the wilderness.

It was a gloomy day in the annals of Deadwood's crime-stained history—dark in the aspect of the lowering, leaden sky, and in the hearts of an alarmed and indignant populace.

Notices offering an immense reward for the capture of the desperate outlaw gang, dead or alive, were posted up in conspicuous places on all the approaches to the town; and the Regulator band whose number had been diminished by the loss of a leader and ten men, was reorganized and enlarged to a well-armed company of fifty.

For a commander was chosen a big brawny Missourian, with indomitable courage and immense muscle. His name was Uriah Denby, and he had fought Indians and outlaws since he was a boy of fourteen, without a serious wound. Now he was forty-five.

By his direction ten of the band were sent out into the surrounding mountains and gorges, well-armed and provisioned, and ordered to keep a sharp look-out for the road-agents.

And when evening once more settled over the metropolis, the people thereof felt a better sense of security than they had, earlier in the day.

But this feeling was dissipated, when the Cheyenne stage arrived and a dozen badly scared passengers told their story.

The stage had been stopped not ten miles below Deadwood, in a lonely spot, by the so-called Phantom Road-Agent and his full band, numbering in all about thirty masked men, and the passengers had been robbed of their watches, money, jewelry and fire-arms, aggregating in worth to about a thousand dollars. Besides, Bond & Moxey, the Deadwood brokers, had five thousand dollars in paper money locked up in the treasure-box, and this was burst open by the daring gang, and the money appropriated.

Altogether it was the most daring robbery on the road for months. By the stage-driver the Phantom Road-Agent had sent a letter directed to Uriah Denby, chief of the Regulators. Great curiosity was aroused when this was delivered to the new captain, as he sat smoking in the Metropolitan bar. His men and a crowd of prominent citizens crowded around, eager to learn what the Prince of the Road had to say.

The envelope was directed in a ragged, scrawling

hand, and clearly was not the manly chirography of Deadwood Dick. Inclosed was a blank sheet of paper.

"The devil!" exclaimed Denby, as he made the discovery, "this is a sell. There is no writing in the letter."

And he passed the sheet around among the assemblage for inspection.

"Ha! that is writin', though!" ejaculated one old fellow, handing it back to Denby. "Bring a lamp, and hold that critter atwixt your gaze and the light."

A lamp was accordingly produced, and, putting on his spectacles, the big chief held the mysterious missive between his gaze and the lamp-light.

True enough, a few faint, shadowy lines now became visible, and the writing was not unlike Deadwood Dick's.

"Come! what's it say?" demanded the anxious throng. "Read out loud."

"Humph!" said Denby, looking a trifle grim, "this is what it says:

"MR. URIAH DENBY, Esq.—By unanimous vote, you have been chosen leader of the so-styled Deadwood Regulators. You may be an honest man and a truly good fellow, but you have, in your old age, mistaken your vocation. I do not wish to strike you, nor those under you. Deadwood Dick's vow of vengeance has been fulfilled, in the death of the ten Regulators at the 'Slop-Bucket.' But, if you move against my men, it extends to you. Therefore, I warn you in time. Myself you cannot harm; all you could do, would be to go to my lonely grave in the depth of the Black Hills, and seek to *re-bill* my decaying body. My spirit has a long lease of liberty. It is with you every day, and knows all your intentions. Again I advise you to remain passive, and not turn my avengers against you. Adieu. These lines traced by the spirit hand of

"DEADWOOD DICK."

"Well, by thunder!" was the general comment, when, after a long silence, the assemblage found their tongues. "That's the essence of cheekiness, if ever there was any. What d'ye think, Denby?"

"I don't know what to think, boys!" replied the new chief, candidly.

"But you have your opinion. D'ye think there's any spirit about this business?"

"Yes, I should say there was considerable spirit manifested in this 'Slop-Bucket' affair. As to the immortality of this accursed scamp, I am unable to render any decision. I never believed in any ghostly nonsense before; but you all affirm that this same Deadwood Dick was not long ago hung, till he was dead."

"Ay, ay! till he war deader'n a dried herring!" decided a dozen.

"Then, either this is his ghost, or some of his men rigged up in his toggery to personate him. It's one or the other, mark my word."

"But, that's Dick's writin', plain enough!" declared one of the miners, who had oft-times seen the young road-agent's penmanship, "an' of some one war playin' off on us, they couldn't write like that, I'll bet a coon-skin."

"Not unless they imitated from copy," replied Denby, thoughtfully. "I see no other way at present, than we shall have to accept of it as Deadwood Dick's ghost."

And thus it was settled in the minds of the people of Deadwood's magic city. A few strong-minded ones "Bah-ed!" and poked fun at the preposterous idea, as they termed it; but most of the citizens and "floaters" were nervous and alarmed at such a state of affairs. Several notorious women on the following morning even took the back stage for Cheyenne, so terrified were they lest the Phantom Road-Agent should visit them—for it was known they had won much money, since their arrival, at the gaming-table.

"Will you move against the agents?" asked the senior partner of the Ida Gray mine, whose moneyed influence in the Black Hills was second to none.

"Certainly!" decided Denby, without a moment's consideration. "I am not scared bad at this so-called warning, and shall go on just the same as though I had not received it. By the way, you passengers who were robbed, how did this Phantom Rider appear, when you saw him?"

"Silent and grim as a balky near-wheeler!" volunteered Jehu, coming up at this juncture. "He just sot out his hoss as if glued thar, an' never spoke a word. When he'd any d'rections to give, he just waved his paw, and the men they got 'em—bet your pile on that."

"An' w'en they'd got th'r'u, he heaved that letter ter one of the gang, who fetched it to me, an' told me ter d'liver et to Uriaher Denby, w'ich I did."

"I see no way to move just yet," said the new Regulator chief, in answer to a question of a prominent speculator. "The way the matter stands, I don't know the place to strike at. The gang are here one minute, and there the next;—in fact they are as uncertain as a swarm of lively fleas, for until you ketch 'em, you haven't got 'em."

So matters rested, and the crowd dispersed, all conversing on the all-absorbing topic of the day—the deeds and doings of Deadwood Dick.

The "Metropolitan" gaming-parlor, though without separation from the bar and dancing parts of the big apartment, was yet distinct from them, only a class seeking gaming amusement being allowed upon the rich carpet beyond the boundary. The rougher set generally hovered near the bar and dancers, so that the assemblage at the gaming-tables was less savage and desperate.

Women as well as men played for stakes—in fact, some of our sharpest players in Deadwood are of the tender sex, though some of them are rather more "tough" than tender.

One woman to be found here, night and day, and a very paying card to the management, was the "Vailed Queen," as everybody called her, from the fact that her face was ever vailed. She played a good square game, and was regarded as the richest card player in Deadwood—perhaps, in the world.

The receiving clerk of Wells, Fargo & Co., declared that within the six months of her stay in the Black Hills, they had transmitted for her to different banks throughout the West, moneys to the amount of nearly a million; besides, Bond & Moxey held a large sum in keeping for her.

Her name, people said, was Ida Burton, but she was more generally known as the "Vailed Queen." In form she was remarkably neat and trim, and her dress was always of the richest material, she rarely ever appearing in the same suit more than twice or three times. Jewels of wonderful magnitude and value, were worn upon her gloved hands, her face was always hidden behind that thick green veil; her hair was great in profusion, reaching far below the waist in a shimmering cloud.

On this evening of which we have been writing, the Vailed Queen sat at her table, which was not surrounded as usual with a throng of lookers-on.

Only one man was playing with her. Nevertheless the game was an exciting one, for the hitherto successful queen was losing heavily. Almost every known game of cards had been played; still the man went on winning, as coolly as if he was not working his best to win.

He was a little bewhiskered gamester from the silver mines of Idaho, named Lotus, and was reputed in that section never to have lost a game.

"The bank's broke!" said the queen, at last, throwing down the cards. "I'll not play another game with you, for you've won a thousand dollars, already, and that's quite enough."

Without a word the gambler raked in his stakes, and "pulled out," leaving the card queen to herself, for the gaming part of the building was nearly deserted, owing to the recent arrival of the stage with its crowd of robbed passengers.

As she sat there her gaze—for she was enabled to look through the veil—wandered carelessly over the crowd; then suddenly she started violently, and uttered an inaudible exclamation, as she beheld two men approaching her.

They were the two men whom we first saw in pursuit of Leone—Jasper Leslie and Curtis Sydnor.

They had come into Deadwood but an hour since, from an unsuccessful hunt in the mountains, and were not in the best of humor, as may be surmised.

"It's devilish queer what has become of the cursed girl!" Leslie was growling, looking horribly haggard and gaunt, from his long jaunt. "I will break every bone in her body, if I once get her again."

"That will not help the matter, at all!" replied Sydnor, sneeringly. "You promised me the girl for my wife, within three months, if I would not foreclose the mortgage on that ranch of yours, and the time's been up for two months. To-morrow I shall take the first stage for Cheyenne, on my way back to Texas. If ever you show your face in or about Austin in the future, I will have you arrested and lynched as a wife-murderer!"

"Bah! I do not believe Celeste is dead. I have always had an idea she swam to shore, that terrible night on the Missouri. Anyhow, you could prove nothing."

"Couldn't I? I could swear I saw you pitch her overboard from the upper deck of the steamboat; I can also testify that you abused her two children, until you forced them to flee from under your roof; that you mortgaged their property to me, and even tried to assassinate the boy. All these circumstances, mentioned in a Texas court of justice, could not fail to insure you a halter, and a grave—three feet under the ground. How do you like the picture, Jasper Leslie?"

"It isn't an attractive one," growled the elder; "still, I am not afraid of you. Hello! here is the Vailed Queen, we heard about. I'll tell you what I'll do, Sydnor. I'll play you a game of cards for the ranch at Austin. If you win, it is yours; if I win it is mine. Will you do it?"

"Certainly not. The property belongs to me, right-fully, now, and I'd be a fool to gamble it away. We will, however, try this sharper a hand for a hundred a side, just to pass away time. Will you play, madam?"

"With pleasure, sirs," replied the queen, bringing out a fresh pack of cards from a drawer under the table. "What shall it be?"

"Old sledge," replied Leslie. "I'm better on that than on other games."

"Very well,—sledge it is, then. Plank 'em!" and the mysterious woman laid a crisp hundred dollar bill down for them to cover.

Both Sydnor and Leslie followed suit, and then the game began. As it progressed Leslie kept his eyes riveted upon the face of the Vailed Gamester, as if he was half-suspicious of her. But why?

The game was played through and resulted in her favor.

"Curse you!" cried Sydnor, losing his temper as well as his money, "your luck cannot be lasting. I'll stake a thousand against you."

"And I too!" growled miserly Leslie, hoping to retrieve himself.

"Very well. The more the merrier!" replied the gambler, with a strange laugh. "I can accommo-date you with ten thousand, if that would be satisfactory."

"No; I do not care to risk much. I will, however, make it five thousand, if you say so."

"All right; I'm suited."

Accordingly fifteen thousand dollars—ten of it in checks—was planked, and the cards dealt. Sydnor considered himself an adept at gaming, but it proved

that neither he nor Leslie was a match for the vailed queen. Down went the last pastebord, and the game was hers.

"Woman, I believe you are in league with the devil!" hissed Sydnor, rising. "I've got enough gaming for to-night, but remember, I'm bound to get back what I've lost, sometime."

"Very well, sir. I shall always be happy to accommodate you," replied the woman, raking in her winnings, as the two defeated men sauntered away.

But after they were nearly lost among the crowd, she turned and shook her clenched right hand after them, her teeth grating together fiercely.

"Oh! I know you, Jasper Leslie!" she muttered under her breath—"know you, and loathe and hate you. And now that Fate has cast you across my path, I shall not let you escape until I have made you feel the full measure of my power—of my vengeance!"

CHAPTER X.

IN THE MOUNTAINS—THE ROAD-AGENTS.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Black Harper, triumphantly, bending his repulsive face still closer, and pressing his coarse lips to Leone's cheek. "Ha! ha! my pretty dear; so I've found you, at last, eh? Didn't think I was going to let such a pigeon as you escape my trap, did you? If you did, you were muchly mistaken. Chaw off my ear, but you're pretty an' sweet enough to eat!"

And the ruffian held her head between his great hands, and forcibly kissed her upon the lips, to her horror and disgust.

She struggled desperately to get free, but it was no use. He had bound her hand and foot, while she slept, and she was as helpless as a new-born babe. But he had neglected to gag her, and she uttered shriek after shriek for assistance.

"Donald—Mr. Yates!" she screamed shrilly—"help! help! help!"

"Oh! you needn't screech for help, 'cause no one'll hear you, unless et ar that cuss over thar by the camp-fire, an' he's bound and gagged. So shut up your yawp, if you don't want me to crack you beside o' the head. I ain't in a mood fer none o' yer yowlin', cuss'd if I am; though I *did* have fine luck in cagin' ye, fer a fact. Sit up—there, like that, an' I'll kerry ye to the light."

Leone was so terrified that she could no longer scream; therefore she suffered herself to be dragged toward the fire, without offering vocal resistance.

Here the outlaw seated her upon one of the campstools, young Yates occupying a similar position, though a cruel wooden gag was fastened in his mouth.

"There! now you're both as cozy as a bug in a rug, ain't you?" and the ruffian gave vent to a malignant chuckle. "I'm sure ye can't complain, when you don't git no worse usage than this. I had a mind to knife you both, at first, but then I concluded I could make good use o' both o' you;—the gal for my wife, and the feller for a sort o' servant. Wait till I import my jolly bucks ter this place, an' ye'll see lively times, bet your gaiters! I intend to make a monstrous fortune out o' this claim. Just hold on till I git hold o' Calamity Jane; then not a livin' mortal will squeal o' this place."

"You are a villain and a monster!" gasped Leone, recovering her power of speech.

"Yes, I know I am!" accepted he, with a malignant grin. "I'll bet a cuss ye'll find me bizness, tho', clear to the backbone. Call me all the pritty names ye like, an' I'll chaw 'em down like fat venison, so long's they come from yer lips o' honey. But ef any other cuss'd call me a lantern-jawed half-an'-half, ye'd just see me insert my carvin' knife under his fifth rib, in the latest approved fashion. Yes; you bet your pile on that!"

"You are a disgusting braggart!" said Leone, contemptuously, "and a coward, too, or you wouldn't bind a helpless girl. You have taken my weapons; what harm could I do if you were to let me have the use of my limbs?"

"Thar's no tellin' what ye'd do. I hain't a-goin' to run no risks. It's a cussed sight easier fer me to watch ye, tied up nor it would be to have you free."

"At least take that gag out of Mr. Yates' mouth, then. It must hurt terribly."

"No, I won't, my daisy. I reckon he won't die just yet from actual pain. Just you let me do the bossin' about this ranch, if you please. Reckon I'm big enough an' know enough."

"What you know will never cause you to have the brain fever!" flashed back Leone.

At this juncture there was a faint cry audible to the hearing of all, seeming to come from the direction of the canyon-entrance to the cavern.

"What the devil was that?" growled Black Harper, laying hold of a revolver butt, and peering off into the gloom. "Et sounded like the cry of a young painter."

"Better go and see, you coward!" taunted Leone, sneeringly. "You are 'fraid of the squeal of a rat, I do believe."

"Not much, I ain't; but that warn't no rat music, I know well enough. Listen to that, will you?"

Just then there was a sound of half-suppressed laughter from off in the darkness; then the indistinct murmur of voices.

"Some one is coming to our rescue, thank God!" exclaimed Leone. "Have courage, Mr. Yates; help is coming!"

"No, I'm cursed if it is!" roared Black Harper, drawing and cocking his revolvers, with a string of horrible oaths. "I'll make sausage-meat out of 'em, see 'f I don't now!" and he leaped off into the gloom, in search of the intruders.

"Now is our time, Mr. Yates!" exclaimed Leone, in a shrill whisper. "We must contrive to get free,

while he is absent. Can you get your hands or feet loose?"

Donald shook his head in the negative.

"Wait, then; I'll try and get that gag out. Hitch along on your stool toward me."

By their united efforts they soon succeeded in bringing themselves close together; then the miner bent his head down to Leone's side, and with the fingers of one hand she picked the knot out of the cord that bound the gag. It was a tedious undertaking, but she accomplished it at last, and the gag fell from his mouth.

"There, so much is done," she whispered, joyfully. "Quick, now; try and see if you cannot loosen the cords that bind my hand."

"Yes; bend a little lower, please—there, that's the kind," and the young man attacked the hard drawn knots with a will. "I wonder who it was that made the noises, off there. Friends?"

"No! Nobody made them, except myself. I am gifted with ventriloquial power, and sent that ruffian off on a fool's errand, in order to give us a chance to make our escape. God grant he may not return before we get our hands and feet free!"

"To which I say amen," replied Yates, fervently. "Confound the rope; it's drawn tighter than a lock, and I don't believe I can loosen it. Hark!"

Footsteps heavy and noisy were approaching, rapidly.

"My Heaven! 'tis Black Harper returning!" exclaimed Leone, and she spoke truly, for in the next moment the outlaw leaped in upon the scene, uttering a volley of terrible blasphemy.

"No ye don't, my conspiring ducklings—my beloved schemers!" he cried, lifting Leone bodily in his arms, and carrying her to another seat, then returning to Donald and administering him several sound slaps in the face. "Thort you war goin' to escape just as easy 's ye please, didn't ye? Haw! haw! haw! I kin just fancy you two escapin' together, an' me overtakin' ye!"

"Don't let your fancy carry you too far," said Leone, nearly ready to cry over her defeat. "We will outwit you, yet."

"I rather don't think so, my beautiful bricktop. When it comes daylight, I shall take you to my ranch in the depths of the mountains, and there I an' you will live in peace an' plenty til we ascend the golden stairs. This feller, here, I shall leave a temporary inmate o' the Golden Bar, until I can bring back my band o' fellers an' set 'em to work."

So saying the ruffian threw himself down in front of the fire, and lit a cigar.

"Did you find any one?" asked Leone, her tone sarcastic; her wonderful eyes shedding a mocking light.

"Yes!" boldly lied the outlaw; "I met three fellers off yonder in the darkness, who had accidentally stumbled into hayr, an' didn't kno' the way out."

"Indeed! What did you do with them?"

"Oh! I simply slipped a knife in under the fifth rib of each, an' it actually tickled 'em to death. So I left 'em."

"You don't say so! What do you think about it, Mr. Yates?"

"It's about the largest sized lie I ever heard!" affirmed Donald.

"What! durst you call me a liar—you, a man!" yelled the ruffian, suddenly flying into a rage. "Take that, ye long-lipped monkey!"

And the next instant a bullet from his revolver grazed Donald's cheek, not, however, drawing any blood.

"Blaze away!" cried the young miner, indifferently; "I'd much rather you'd kill me outright than use me for target practice. I am not afraid to die."

"D'ye s'pose I'd kill ye to onc't?" growled Harper, looking doubly savage, in the firelight. "Och! no; not much! I want to use you, before ye peg out."

The night passed away, and once more the light of day penetrated the mammoth cavern. The outlaw then proceeded to cook breakfast out of what comprised the Golden Bar stock of provender, and soon had a palatable meal set out.

He offered Leone a portion of the food, and she accepted and ate it, her quick wit and judgment telling her that she had best not lose any strength, if she ever hoped to escape, when she would need it all. But poor Yates was left out in the cold, Black Harper obstinately refusing to let him eat, despite all our heroine's entreaties in his behalf.

"You are a hog, that's what you are!" Leone cried, indignantly. "Any one but a heartless brute, would not wish to starve a person; whether he be a prisoner or not."

"Oh! I guess he'll get along very well; besides I've no more grub 'n I want myself," replied the ruffian.

"Well—here's more food than I want; let him share it with me, then!"

"No, I won't. Let him go without—and shet yer infernal clack!"

So Donald was doomed to go without any breakfast. But then he was not very hungry, and did not miss it much.

That day passed by, Black Harper sleeping by spells in front of the camp-fire, but never so lost in slumber as to not know what was going on about him. He was wonderfully keen of hearing, and any attempt on the part of Leone and Donald to move nearer to each other was sure to arouse him, and their plans were frustrated.

When night once more slanted her grim, gloomy shadows into the cavern, he rose and prepared another meal, this time feeding Donald and Leone, each in turn; then he permitted them to lie down on separate blankets, while he took up his lonely vigil, with only the crackling of the glowing fire for company.

Thus three days more were passed at Golden Bar; and on the morning of the fourth the outlaw said:

"I have bin waitin' heer in hopes o' capturin' Calamity Jane, an' gittin' the ten thousand dollars I heard she kerried about her harness. But it 'pears she ain't comin'; so I reckon we'll quit this place, fer present, and go to my den in the Hills."

Arrangements were accordingly made. Leone and Yates were bound together side by side, as if they were the Siamese twins, but in a manner so that they could in no way loose each other's bonds. Their feet were then cut free, and they were prepared for a long tramp.

At Black Harper's direction they quitted Golden Bar, and emerged into the canyon beyond, he bringing up the rear with a revolver ready for use should they make an attempt to run. But there was no use of undertaking such a feat, as they were so bound as to render swift locomotion impossible.

After a long, tiresome tramp they reached the forks where the main canyon crossed the transverse one.

"I wish we were going to Deadwood!" sighed Leone, glancing down the rugged route that she knew led to the magic city. "I wish to heaven I had staid there, instead of coming off into this wilderness of dangers. I could have eluded my enemies there as well as here, no doubt."

"I wish we would meet some one that I know," said Donald, in reply. "But I fear we are doomed to go with this ruffian far into the mountains, perhaps never to return. But let us not give up while there is the faintest shadow of a hope."

"Yes, while there is life there is hope." No halt was made, but the journey continued steadily up the other gulch, the ruffian captor allowing his prisoners no time to rest. The place was passed where Johnson, the colored man, was shot down, but nothing of his remains was to be seen. Either some one had removed him, or the wolves had feasted upon his corpse.

The dead horse still lay where it had fallen; but this was all.

On was tramped the two prisoners and their captor through the lonely gorge.

High on either side rose mighty walls of gray rock, fringed maybe a hundred feet above with a growth of young pines. The canyon gradually descended the further they advanced, seemingly aiming for the very bowels of the earth.

It was mid-afternoon ere the outlaw permitted his prisoners to halt and rest, by a fresh, clear spring of water that bubbled from a rocky crevice.

Leone was nearly exhausted, and her companion was also somewhat fatigued, although he was better able to stand the journey than she.

"For God's sake, where are you taking us?" he demanded, speaking for the first time in several hours. "How long are we to keep up this confounded tramp through desolate canyons?"

"Till I get ready to let ye stop," replied Harper, grimly. "Reckon of we keep on steady, we'll get to my ranch about midnight."

"How far are we from Deadwood?" asked Leone.

"We are about five mile, as the crow flies."

"What? You cannot mean it. We were eight miles distant when at the canyon forks, and we've come nearer ten than nine miles since leaving there."

"Waal, mebbe we have; but ye see this gulch ar' powerful deceivin'." It winds, curves an' crooks about like a garter snake, an' finally comes to an end in the face of a rocky peak, the t'other side o' which is Deadwood City. D'ye see?"

Only about ten minutes was allowed for rest; then the march was again resumed.

"I cannot hold out more than till dark, I believe," Leone murmured, as they were urged on by the merciless ruffian in the rear. "I am already nearly worn out."

"God knows you have my sympathy, dear, replied Donald, feelingly. "When you feel too tired to go further, we will—"

He did not finish the sentence, for just then a band of horsemen suddenly galloped around a curve in the canyon, at full tilt, making rather an imposing spectacle. All, save one, were mounted upon snow-white horses, and they were alike with one exception, all clad in the picturesque garb of the mountaineer.

The one exception was in the advance of all the rest, mounted upon a fiery black steed. He was clad from top to toe in black habiliments; the saddle and accompanying trappings were black, as also were the gloves upon his shapely hands, and the half-mask upon his face.

The others were masked, too, and all were armed with polished rifles, revolvers and knives, and as looked upon by a casual observer, might have been pronounced a dangerous gang of men.

The moment Black Harper saw them he uttered a savage oath, and, turning quickly, he sped back down the canyon as fast as he could run, leaving his captives at the spring. Some of the horsemen gave instant chase, but the main portion came to a halt in front of Donald and Leone, the Black Rider at their head.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Leone," Yates whispered, reassuringly. "We can consider these fellows our friends, I judge, for it is Deadwood Dick, the phantom, and his jolly road-agents!"

CHAPTER XI. TO THE "IRONHOLD."

THE road-agents did not speak for several moments, but finally one who appeared to be a sort of a lieutenant, broke the silence.

"Well, strangers, what does this look like? Rather suggestive that you've been took in, ain't it?"

"Yes, I should say so. We have been the captives of the wretch who just dug out, for nigh on six

days. Your coming has at least relieved the monotony, for all we may be changing from bad hands into worse."

"You need not fear us. Do you know who and what we are?"

"You are Deadwood Dick's band of road-agents, are you not?"

"Exactly—the same. This gentleman, or spirit, upon the black horse, is the Phantom Chief of our band. Though he may appear mortal to you, that does not make him so. He was hung in Deadwood, not long ago, but his spirit came back to us, after we had buried his body six feet in the ground."

Donald smiled. He was not so blind, he told him self, as to believe that that figure on the black charger was other than flesh and blood. The lower part of the face was natural, and this alone convinced him that the "spirit" of Deadwood Dick was contained in flesh, instead of being disembodied, as the lieutenant would have him believe.

"Of course it's none of my business," he said, bowing; "but I am not so much of a blockhead as to swallow such trash. Whether the black horseman is Deadwood Dick or no, I will not say; but I'll bet the worth of a Rothschild that if you will kindly lend me a revolver, I can drop him out of the saddle in short meter."

The lieutenant dismounted and cut the prisoner's bonds, a low laugh breaking from his lips.

"Can't fool you, can I? Well, all the difference is, if you had believed what others believe, you would have been set free and given an escort nearly back to Deadwood. As it is, we shall take you along to our retreat, where you will have the chance to join our band and swear the oath of eternal allegiance, or remain in durance until we see fit to set you at liberty. You see this ghost business is serving us admirably, and we dare not let you go lest you should release our valuable cat from its bag of confinement."

"Then you man is the original Prince of the Road?" asked Donald.

"I am the same!" replied Deadwood Dick, riding closer, and raising his mask, and disclosing the ever-handsome face of Edward Harris.

At this instant Leone uttered a cry of mingled astonishment and joy, as she sprang toward the young road-agent.

"Gerald! Gerald! my dear brother!" she exclaimed, her face pale and eyes shining. "Is it possible?"

"Your brother, miss?" echoed the Prince of the Road, incredulously. "I'm not your brother. I am Deadwood Dick."

"No! no! you are my brother Gerald, whom I have not seen in three years. Do you think you can deceive me?"

"I am not trying to deceive you, my dear young lady. You are the one that is deceived, if you have taken me for your brother. I have but one sister—Anita, who lives in Deadwood. Do I resemble the brother to whom you refer?"

"Oh! yes!" cried Leone, excitedly, "and I still believe you are he. You have his face, his eyes, his hair, and his form. Oh! sir, do not deceive me; I have come all the way from Texas to find him."

"Ah!" said Deadwood Dick, thoughtfully, "I see, or I think I do. My dear girl, I am not your brother, but I can tell you of him. Be calm, now, for I am going to tell you that he is dead. Some time since a young man was arrested and hung in Deadwood, by the Regulators, for me, he being the exact counterpart of myself. He told the lynchers that his name was Gerald Hawk; but they were positive that he was Deadwood Dick, and so they strung him up; and the world still believes they hung me, till I was dead."

"I heard of the fate of the unfortunate young man, and with my men, went and cut down the body, brought it into the mountains, and gave it a decent burial. Since then people have declared me a ghost, and I have helped to keep up the deception. Over the grave of your brother I swore a vow of vengeance—not so much on the account of his untimely end, but because it was a good excuse to further my aims in avenging other atrocities—and I have kept it to the letter."

Leone received the news without any violent outbreak of emotion. She seemed partially stunned by the shock; her heart wept bitterly even while her eyes were tearless. And thus she remained for some time, the others refusing to break the silence that was sacred to her.

At last, however, she spoke:

"I must not forget your kindness," she said, gratefully, "and I thank you for it. Could you show me to my brother's grave?"

"Yes. Come with me to my stronghold, and on the morrow I will do as you wish," replied Deadwood Dick. "Do not be afraid to come with me, and my men. Road-agents though we are, we all have big hearts and due respect for ladies. In the life of my lieutenant, here, you will find an amiable companion during your stay, of about your own age; and I assure you every attention shall be yours, while I am around."

At this juncture the road-agents who had been in pursuit of Black Harper galloped back, and rejoined the band.

"Well? How about the ruffian?" asked Deadwood Dick, seeing that they brought back no prisoner.

"He's stretched out, down in the canyon, yonder," replied one of the men. "He war runnin' at the top o' his speed, when all of a sudden he stubbed his toe, an' down he went, like a thousan' o' brick. When we got to him, we found that he'd broke his neck, short off."

"A good riddance," said the Prince, quietly. "He's got a gang of cutthroats here in the hills, somewhere, that we shall take the pleasure of cleaning out, some of these days; but not now. The

Deadwoodites are too wide awake, and might take the 'toughs' into partnership, in order to circumvent us."

"If you are of a gold-loving turn of mind," said Donald, resolving to make the best of an undesirable situation, "you might as well return to the poor cuss, and remove from his person about eight thousand dollars worth of gold, which belongs to me and Miss Leone, here. I suppose you will appropriate it, but you might as well have it as any one else."

"Lieutenant Audley, you may take part of the men and go for the gold," directed Deadwood Dick, after a moment's thought. "With the rest I will return to the stronghold, whither you can follow. Miss Hawk—for I am led to suppose that is your name—you and your companion will accompany us. Gaspard, you and Le Greuf can dismount and walk, while these footsore twain take your places in the saddle."

Accordingly arrangements were made as the young chief directed. Lieutenant Audley with a dozen men set off down the canyon, while two saddles were emptied for the occupancy of Donald and Leone; then, after Deadwood Dick had replaced his mask, the remainder of the band took an opposite course up the canyon.

They galloped on for perhaps a mile; then struck into a narrow path, single file, that led up a nearly perpendicular and densely wooded mountain-side. The ascent was extremely arduous and difficult for the horses, and the riders were frequently required to bend on a level with the saddle to keep from being swept out of their seats.

"If this is the way to your stronghold, why don't you clear away the branches?" said Donald, addressing Deadwood Dick, who was just in advance.

For the simple reason that few would attempt to ascend here, in the face of the contending obstacles, with an idea of finding me and my band. To an inexperienced eye, this path would be deemed too rough and obstructed for a horse's ascent."

"Your retreat is on the mountain-top, then, I suppose?"

"Yes—and here we are," was the reply, as they rode abruptly up out of the thicket onto a large plateau, as level as the floor of a house. On all the surrounding edges rose tall thickets of beech and young lindens, which completely hid the view of the neighboring country—fenced in the plateau, and made it a secret to the outside world. There was about half an acre of the top, and it was as if the mountain had been sawn off, leaving a smooth floor of solid rock. Upon it was built two cabins, composed of rocks, clay and logs, and joining each other; also a row of thatched sheds, for the horses, at one side.

"By George! this is a capital stronghold!" cried Yates, his sharp glance taking in the scene immediately. "Here, a few men, well-armed, could hold an army at bay, as easily as chawing b'-ar-meat."

"Exactly," assented Deadwood Dick. "It is an admirable nest, and that's the reason I chose it. A little unhandy to the stage road, to be sure; but our spies keep us constantly informed of the 'fat lays,' in time for us to be in waiting. How about it; do you think you would like to become one of us—a merry road-rider?"

"No, indeed," replied Donald, flushing. "I would rather be excused. My sense of honor is too fresh for that."

"Very well; just as you like; only you will have to remain in confinement."

"Better than that to lower my good name, of which I am right proud. What do you think of the place, Leone?"

"I like it," replied the girl, allowing the young chief to help her dismount; and had she added: "I like Deadwood Dick also," she would have only told the plain, unvarnished truth, for immediately upon their meeting she had conceived a sudden liking for the handsome young road-agent, for which she could not account. He seemed so grand and noble above other men she had met; there was an inexplicable fascination about him that with her untutored heart she could not resist.

Donald saw this, and it caused a jealous pang to go worming its way through his heart. He had, even in captivity, been building air-castles of what enjoyment he was to have when he got Leone for his bride—for the poor fellow had had no doubt any of the time but what he and the beautiful girl would sooner or later be man and wife. Therefore it caused him much jealous indignation to see her smile upon the outlawed Prince of the Road.

The remainder of Dick's party had by this time reached the plateau, and after all had dismounted, the chief led the way toward the smaller of the two cabins, Leone and Donald bringing up the rear.

"You'd better look out how you become too familiar with him, miss," the young miner cautioned, in a low tone. "He is the worst desperado in the Black Hills, and cannot be trusted under any circumstances."

Leone flashed upon him a curious look.

"You are jealous; that's what's the matter with you!" she retorted, mischievously. "Don't get jealous, I pray, Mr. Yates, for I don't believe I care a cent for this elegant road-agent, and I'm positive I don't for you. There, now!" and she tossed her confusion of bricky curls saucily.

Yates flushed to the temples, and hot words rose upon his lips; but he swallowed them back by a strong effort.

"You are candid!" was his substitute for them, and the sarcasm in his tone was keen.

"I am always candid," she replied, feeling sorry for what she had said, yet too proud to acknowledge it. "Come, here is our future prison."

"No!" corrected Deadwood Dick, turning, after unlocking and opening the door. "This is your pal-

ace, Miss Hawk. Come in and see how you like the home of a merry road-agent."

They all entered and gazed about them. The cabin was divided into two apartments, the larger one, in which they stood, being carpeted with wolf-skin robes, with the furry side up. The walls were also hung in the same style, and the effect was, with a ruddy fire blazing on a hearth in a distant corner, truly cheering. Several sumptuous couches of soft furs were made up in different places, and half a dozen camp-stools distributed about. This comprised the interior adornment, but it all looked so comfortable and snug that Leone uttered a cry of ecstasy.

"It's perfectly splendid. But where is the lieutenant's wife you spoke of?"

"Her apartment is in the other building. Be seated, and make yourself at home, and I will call her. In the adjoining room yonder, you will find conveniences for making your toilet, if you wish."

And bowing the Prince of the Road retired through a side door into the other cabin, which was given over to Lieutenant Audley, his wife and the band. A moment later a man entered with a couple of torches which he thrust into crevices in the wall and then retired. It was already dark on the mountain-top, and the sky was overcast with gray, leaden clouds, threatening a heavy blow of wind and rain.

Leone on entering the adjoining room found a rough table, a wash-basin, comb, brush, towel and mirror; and with the use of these she was able to put herself in a more presentable condition. She found Donald lounging on the skins before the blazing fire, when she returned, engaged at his meerschaum, of which Black Harper had not robbed him.

"You can go in and wash and fix yourself up if you wish," said Leone, seating herself upon one of the camp-stools. "Perhaps you can eradicate that grim look from your face."

"I don't think so," was the cold reply. "At least I shall not try very hard."

"As you like. It is not for me to urge you."

Then there was a long silence, which was finally broken by the entrance of a young woman, bearing a tray of fragrant, steaming coffee and roasted venison. It was the lieutenant's wife. She was of medium stature and rather stoutly built, yet she was evidently not out of her teens. In face she was wondrously pretty, her features being regular and full, her complexion fair, and her hair and eyes of a soft, lovely brown.

She sat down the tray and advanced toward Leone with extended hands, a smile of welcome upon her lips, an expression of admiration in her eye.

"So you are the new arrival Captain Dick is so rapturous over, eh?" she spoke, with a pleasant little laugh. "Well, well, I'm sure I admire his taste. You are just a little beauty, dear; and I am sure we shall be famous friends. Ah! you have a friend, eh?"

"Yes, this is Mr. Yates," replied Leone. "You I suppose are Mrs. Audley."

"I am. My husband"—and just then it appeared there was a tinge of bitterness in her tone—"is a lieutenant in Captain Dick's band. Perhaps you saw him."

"So I did, but he was masked, and I could not see much of his face. I think your chief is very handsome."

"So he is, and as noble as he is handsome. I've often wished it had fallen to my lot to have won him, instead of Fred Audley."

Deadwood Dick sauntered in, later in the evening, and the trio conversed together, merrily—Donald Yates, however, refusing to join in. He had the "sulks," the provoking Leone laughingly remarked, which accounted for his silence.

All were thus engaged when one of the men stuck his head in at the door, and announced that a man wished to see the chief.

"Show him in!" ordered the Prince; and then entered one whom none had expected to see, in the person of the girl dare-devil—Calamity Jane!

CHAPTER XII. WHO IS THE TRAITOR?

It was indeed Calamity, and all recognized her in a moment.

"How in the name of all that is wonderful, did you find your way here?" exclaimed Dick, springing to his feet and extending his black-gloved hand. "I would have sooner expected the old Satan, than you."

The young woman laughed in her quiet fashion, as she shook hands all round.

"I am 'bout as much surprised as the rest o' ye, I reckon," was her reply. "I shouldn't 'a' cum, only I didn't find no one at my caboose; so I set out on the trail, and run across some o' your gang, and on bein' assured that you weren't no spirit, I made up my mind to come up an' pay you a visit. And who should I see here, but my old pard Don, and my new pard, Leone."

"Yes. I and my boys met them down the canyon, a piece, in company with Black Harper; but the tough turned tail and dug out, when he saw us, and left his prisoners in our charge. So you come up with Audley and the boys, did you?"

"With the boys, but not with Audley. He has gone on to Deadwood."

"To Deadwood?" echoed the young chief.

"Yes. It was my information, though, that sent him there. Dick, there is among the members of your band no less a viper than a traitor!"

"What? A traitor among my men? Impossible."

"Nay! not impossible. There is some one of your band in communication with the Deadwood Regulators; of this I am positive, for not ten hours ago, I heard old Uriah Denby give his men a perfect description of this place, in the Metropolitan. More'n that, they're plannin' together how to come an' take

you. It seems that they have been advised of your strong defense, and don't know just how to work. I told Audley about it, and so he went on to Deadwood to learn what he could."

"That was right. Audley is a good trustworthy lieutenant, and is sound in his judgment, every time," said Deadwood Dick, reflectively. "But I cannot believe that there is one among my band who would turn traitor. Every man is bound by a fearful oath to respect the laws of our brotherhood, and death is the result of deserting."

"Well, that may be," replied Calamity, seating herself and lighting a cigarette, "but when you consider the inducements offered, you can't much wonder if men do play the traitor. Since Uriah Denby's bin put in Dashing Dave's shoes, the price on your head, Dick, has been swelled to the enormous figure of five thousand dollars. Posters announce this fact stare you in the face all the way from Deadwood up to the canyon forks."

"Yes, no doubt. But the man that earns that reward, let me tell you, will earn it dearly—will wade through blood!" said the road Prince, quietly, though his eyes glittered dangerously. "I hope Audley will return with advices soon, for in the morning I wish to give the men an overhauling. If there is a traitor among them, leave it to me to find him out."

Then the conversation turned onto other topics, and Calamity said:

"And what is it about this ghost business, Dick? All Deadwood believes that you were hung by Dashing Dave and his gang, and I was of that belief, until Audley told me different."

"It wasn't me, or else I shouldn't be here," laughed the chief, gaily;—this time, for a wonder, it was not that horrible laugh, so peculiar to him. "The fellow whom they lynched was, as he asserted with his dying breath, Gerald Hawk, of Austin, Texas. This young lady, Miss Leone, claims to be his sister. A short time ago she was positive I was her brother, so great was the resemblance between the unfortunate young man and myself."

"You say the name was Hawk," said the Dare-devil, thoughtfully. Then she relapsed into silence, studying the glowing coals on the hearth and the face of Leone, alternately.

But she failed to say whether or not the name was familiar to her, or what recollections it brought back to her.

The morning dawned before any one was aware of it, so engrossed were they in conversation. Leone found Bessie, the lieutenant's wife, an excellent companion, and they became firm friends from the first. Bessie was modest, intelligent and affable, but it was apparent that in marrying Lieutenant Audley she had made a sad mistake, for she did not love him.

As soon as they were aware that day had dawned, Deadwood Dick rose and replaced his mask, which he had removed while in the presence of Leone. Why he had done this, probably no one knew, save himself, for Bessie informed our heroine that that was the second time she had ever seen his face uncovered.

"Will you remain with us long, Calamity?" the chief asked, as he was about to quit the cabin.

"Til to-night, I reckon," replied the Dare-devil, "for I don't want to expose you, by slidin' off in daylight. Who knows but Denby may have spies in the canyon, who'd string me up at sight, for bein' among you?"

"You are right. Make yourself at home as long as you choose to stay, for you are welcome."

He then quitted the cabin. Bessie speedily followed, and Leone, Calamity and Donald were left alone.

"Well, Don, how do you like it?" quizzed Calamity, staring hard at the young miner, who lay upon the furs before the hearth, and smoked incessantly at his pipe, as grim and sullen-looking as a cross bear. "What's crossed your nervous system?"

"Nothing, particular. I'd much rather be back at Golden Bar than here, though. Can't you prevail on your desperado friend to let me off?"

"No, I reckon not. Very few have any influence over Dick. He calculates he's the boss of his own bizness, an' he won't take any dislocated jaw from no one."

Bessie soon came in with a tempting breakfast of stewed rabbit and coffee, and was accompanied by Dick, who helped the trio do justice to the meal.

"I think I've got my eye on the traitor, if there is one," he said, leaning back, after having satisfied his appetite. "There is a young Spanish-American in my band, Carlos Cambre, by name, who has on several occasions manifested a disposition to disobey my commands. Of all the thirty men in my band, he is the only one I could even suspect."

"Yet he may be the truest to your cause, of all," said Leone. "Such trifles should not prejudice you."

"I know they shouldn't, but I would not know who else to mistrust. All have served me faithfully, and I should feel ashamed to doubt any of them. However, duty is duty, and I shall inspect them all."

Deadwood Dick's men were well disciplined, and when they were drawn up in line before him, an hour later, they looked every inch the bold, fearless men they were. All were unmasked, now, and a strange variety of faces was presented to view. All were young men, so far as years went; none being over thirty; but the faces of many might have told a different story to a stranger.

Calamity Jane and Donald were present, having left Leone, with Bessie, at the cabin.

The road-agents all seemed to be much surprised to be called thus to order, under the piercing, stern gaze of their young leader, and were perhaps more astonished when he addressed them.

"Fellows!" he said, in the cool, measured tones that oftentimes rather repelled than attracted, after he had ran his keen observing eye over the band. "We have a little matter before us that needs consideration; a matter that involves the peace and security of us all. Therefore, you will see that it is of vital importance."

"Among you there is a traitor to our cause—a faithless wretch, who, for a few dollars of offered reward, has betrayed us to our enemies!"

A great murmur of indignant surprise ran from one end of the line to the other. Deadwood Dick continued:

"I hate to suspect any of you, my boys, for you have all sworn by me, and served my interest faithfully. But I ask you, is it not right that we should investigate the case, and discover, if possible, the traitor, that we may punish him?"

"Certainly! of course!" were the cries given in hearty unison. "If there is a dastard traitor among us, let's snag him out, and give him the penalty!"

Deadwood Dick's face flushed with pride. He loved his men, truly and with his whole heart, and it pleased him to see them so eager to punish treachery.

"Good; well said, my hearties. And now whom shall I suspect? Of you all, only one man would I care to dishonor by suspicion, and even he may be innocent—God knows I hope he is. That man is—"

"Carlos Cambre!" spoke Calamity Jane, for she saw that Dick hated to make the accusation.

In an instant all eyes were turned upon the young Spaniard, for if he was the traitor they wished to see the effect of the accusation.

But only astonishment and indignation were depicted upon the clear face of the suspected man, at the charge. He was a fine-looking fellow of about five and twenty, and there was nothing in his face to excite doubt as to his loyalty and honesty. Yet upon him had rested the chief's suspicion.

"You wrong me, captain," Cambre said, huskily, when he had recovered from the first shock. "Have I not ever served you as faithfully as the rest? To be sure, I have only been a brother two short months, but as God is my judge, I never have been guilty of treachery."

"You have several times appeared loth to obey my commands, sir."

"Probably, but that was owing to my wild, ungovernable spirit, which at times struggles hard for the mastery."

"Exactly; and that same spirit has made you a traitor to our cause!"

"No, captain; by High Heaven, I swear that I am not the guilty one."

"I would like to believe you innocent, Carlos," and Deadwood Dick's stern glance softened a trifle, "but the laws of our order demand that I should find this traitor, even though I have to kill you all to accomplish the work. Therefore, believing in God that I am just, I denounce you as a traitor! Fellow road-agents, what is the penalty?"

There was a short silence, during which many kindly and pitying glances were turned upon Carlos Cambre. Then, in one voice came the answer, grim and terrible in its full realization:

"DEATH!"

As the knell of his doom fell upon his hearing, the young Spaniard cowed his head upon his breast, and tears trickled down over his cheeks. Hardly a road-agent was there but was deeply moved; but the order of their chief aroused them:

"Death! that is the measure usually meted out to traitors!" he said, glancing down the line. "Carlos Cambre, you are then sentenced to death. Boys, bind him to the sapling on yonder edge of the plateau; bring me five loaded and five unloaded rifles, and we will have the terrible work over!"

Reluctantly the road-agents seized their brother outlaw, but he begged for one moment's respite. The poor fellow, when released, walked over to where Deadwood Dick stood, and threw his arms about the young chief's neck and embraced him.

"Good-by, captain," he said, huskily, "good-by! I am content to die for you, whom I have loved as a brother. You are judging me wrongly, for you had no truer man among your band. Good-by, and may your Christian God bless you."

Then he conquered his agitation, went back and surrendered himself into the hands of his brother outlaws.

"Is it possible your heart is of stone?" said a low, sweet voice, and turning about, Deadwood Dick found Leone, accompanied by Bessie, the lieutenant's wife, standing a few steps away. He was greatly affected by Cambre's exhibition of affection, and the words of the Texan girl was the "straw that broke the camel's back."

"No!" he cried, his voice ringing out clearly; "Deadwood Dick still has a heart, for all it has been repeatedly trampled upon. Men, Carlos Cambre is no traitor, and I command you to release him."

A great shout of rejoicing then went up, for none was there among the assembled band who could force themselves to believe in the guilt of the accused.

The chief went straight to Cambre and grasped his hands.

"Forgive me, mate!" he said, huskily, "for my unjust suspicion. I apologize, and will try to do more for you, in time, for I am satisfied you are worthy. Your life you owe to that angel with the brick-red curls, not to me, so you can thank her, if you like. Have I your forgiveness, old boy?"

"Certainly," replied the true-hearted Spaniard. "I should have forgiven you even had I been shot by your orders."

The men were then dismissed, and Leone and Bessie, accompanied by Dick, Donald and Calamity Jane, adjourned to the cabin.

"I was durned sure that cuss weren't the traitor," Calamity said, lighting a cigarette and throwing herself in a careless, easy attitude upon the fur-carpeted floor, "fer ther ain't no snake in his eye, an' I know't."

"No; I am now satisfied he is not guilty," replied the Prince of the Road, staring thoughtfully at Leone. "But I do not know of any one else to suspect. It is strange that Audley don't return."

"He'll come, afore long. And now, do you know what I think you'd better do?"

"No. What?"

"Waal, you'd better take Miss Hawk, here, an' your lieutenant's wife to McKenzie's, in Deadwood. Your sister can take good care of them, and they will be out of danger, which they won't, if they stay here."

"Perhaps you are right," assented Dick, musingly. "Anita thinks I'm dead, but I'll soon set her mind at rest on that score. Will you stay here, in charge, till I return, Jane?"

"Yes, if you like. You'd better take my pard, Yates, along. He will protect your sister and the girls; for you know McKenzie's up in Bozeman this week."

"Ah! yes; so he is; I had nearly forgotten." Accordingly arrangements were made.

An hour later, four persons, well-mounted upon spirited animals, were riding down the canyon toward Deadwood. Three were acquaintances of ours—Donald Yates, Leone, and Bessie; the fourth was a rough-looking old fellow, with shaggy hair and beard, dressed in dirty mining-garb; and not one out of a hundred would have even suspected that under this disguise was the terror of the gold country—Deadwood Dick.

The quartette rode into the magic city about noon, and pushed rapidly up the crowded main street toward the cottage of McKenzie. Leone was shielded as much as possible among the others, lest some of her enemies, on the watch, should discover her.

But, despite their precaution, a woman looking out of an upper window of the Metropolitan saloon, saw and recognized her!

It was the mysterious veiled Card Queen.

And as they passed the saloon, Deadwood Dick also made a discovery.

Standing on the front steps, in earnest conversation, with Uriah Denby, the Regulator chief, was Lieutenant Audley!

At almost the same instant, the lieutenant discovered and pointed out Dick's party to Denby; then the two exchanged a few hurried words, and whirling abruptly, entered the saloon.

What did it mean?

Was Lieutenant Audley the traitor?

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK ON HIS MUSCLE—CALLERS.

"COME! let's hurry up!" said the Road Prince, uneasily, as he spurred his horse into a gallop, "for I'm dubious there's fun ahead, on the horizon."

"How do you mean?" asked Bessie, who had also seen her husband in company with the chief Regulator. "What did you see to alarm you?"

"Nothing to alarm me; but enough to make me know it's unhealthy in this immediate vicinity, for a certain chap who sails under the standard title of Deadwood Dick. Did you see Fred Audley, back there?"

"Yes, I saw him. Do you think he recognized you in your disguise?"

"Certainly. That was Uriah Denby, the new Regulator leader, with him; and Audley pointed me out, and told who I was. He is the traitor!"

Hard lines came into view about Bessie's mouth, but she did not seem shocked.

"I was fearful that such was the case," she said, pain and mortification supplanting any tender feeling she may have had for the man. "But I had no evidence against him. He would have killed you, long ago, had he felt sure that the men would accept him as a chief."

Deadwood Dick frowned, but said no more until they had halted in front of one of a row of recently finished shanties, or "cottages," as they were called, though sad looking cottages were they.

Here he dismounted, and rapped upon the door, at the same time bidding the others dismount, which they did.

Presently the door opened, and a young, pretty-faced woman stood upon the threshold. A glance, and we recognize her by her features as the sister of young Harris, or, Deadwood Dick.

"Good-morning," said the disguised road-agent, bowing low. "Do I behold Anita, the sister of our good chief, Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes, I am his sister. Why do you ask?" questioned Anita, regarding the whole party wondering-ly.

"Because, I have been commissioned to bring here, for you to care for and protect, these two young women and this gentleman. Your brother feels sure you will not refuse to take them in."

"But, sir, my brother is—"

"Alive and well, dear lady, though all Deadwood believes him dead. It was not he who was lynched by Dashing Dave, but another, Gerald Hawk, by name, who was a brother to this young lady, Miss Leone. May I leave my party in your charge?"

"Certainly, and God be praised that Dick still lives!" cried Anita, crying for joy. "There is a stable in the rear for your horses; leave them here, and I will send a boy to care for them. Come right into the house, ladies and gentlemen, and make yourselves at home."

"I must return to the mountains," said Dick. "Miss Hawk, may I speak with you one moment?"

Bessie and Donald accompanied Anita into the cot-

tage; Leone lingered a moment behind, during which time the young chief of the road-agents made bold to take her hand, while he gazed at her lovingly.

"Leone—Miss Hawk," he said, earnestly, "duty calls me back to my men, and I leave you here, because I think it safest. Ere long there is destined to be spilt in these Black Hills, blood—blood of the innocent as well as the criminal. I have warned people to let me alone; if they do not heed my warning, their deaths be on their own heads. In the conflict I may fall, for my lease of life is not forever, I suppose; but if I do, I want you to know of my passionate love for you. You must have been aware of it from the first, for you are not one of the blind. You know just what I am; I know nothing of your past—only that I love you more than any other woman. Therefore, I ask you, if I come to you after I have settled accounts with these Regulators, will you make me a happy man?"

"Wait till you come back," she replied, evading a direct answer. "I will tell you then."

"Thanks, dear young lady; I will consider that as good as a promise, and seal our betrothal, thus."

And before she could prevent him, he had slipped a magnificent cluster diamond ring of exceeding value upon the fore-finger of her left hand, caught her to his breast and imprinted a passionate kiss upon her rosy lips; and then vaulted into the saddle of his waiting horse. In a moment more, he was off up the street like an arrow, so swiftly did he ride.

Leone watched him, with a half-sorrowful, half-pleased look in her dreamy eyes, until the surging hustling crowd hid him from view; then, with a heart pulsating almost wildly in the joy of a newborn love, she turned and entered the cottage, where the others had preceded her, a few moments before.

Straight up through the homely main street of the homelier metropolis cantered Deadwood Dick, until he came to the Metropolitan saloon, when he guided his horse in to the side of the street, leaped out of the saddle, and tied the animal to an awning post.

Then he leisurely ascended the steps that led into the saloon. As he was about to enter, Lieutenant Audley and Uriah Denby, the Regulator, came out.

"Hello!" exclaimed Audley, with an oath, his flushed face showing that he had been drinking rather freely, "here's the very cuss we want, now!"

"Waal, of I'm ther individual ye refer ter," drawled the disguised road-agent, resting his hands upon his hips, his arms akimbo, and his eyes squinted in a laughable manner—"of I'm the ring-tailed roarin' rinosserhoss ye indycate, w'at might be your business?"

"We'll very soon show you!" avowed Audley. "You can't shut my eye up w' your outlandish blarney. You're our game, and you're Deadwood Dick!"

"WHAT?" Apparently the rough-looking customer was astonished. "What'd ye say, boyee! Me Deadwood Dick! Me the grate road-feller, who has got more brass 'n a hull Missouri brass band? Whoop-ee! Sally K. Slukens an' all ther old maid mothers frum hayr ter Omaha! Pickereeled mule's tail an' Mormon chin-music! Durn my old sow's last litter o' pigs of that ain't the worst I've heerd since Jonah swallowed a whale, bone and all!"

"See here!" said Denby, authoritatively, "you may as well surrender, Harris. We've got you this time, without any mistake; so the quicker you give yourself up peacefully, the better it will—"

The Regulator never finished the sentence, for like a sledge-hammer Deadwood Dick's fist hit him between the eyes, and he went hind-foremost down the steps into the street, where he lay like a log, helpless and insensible.

A tremendous kick from the road-agent's boot, in the stomach, stretched Audley out, quietly; then, when a hundred pair of eyes were on him, Deadwood Dick dashed down the steps, and with his gleaming knife deliberately slashed upon the Regulator's forehead the terrible sign of double-daggers! An instant more, and he was on the back of his horse, the halter cut, and up the street at breakneck speed flew the horse and rider, that wild laugh echoing back upon the hearing of an excited and astonished population.

As soon as was possible, forty Regulators were in their saddles, and off in hot pursuit. But with what result?

About dark they came straggling back into Deadwood, gaunt and jaded, having, for their pains, a story to tell of how the daring Road Knight had, after picking off three of their number, eluded them among the intricacies of the mountains, and made his escape.

Uriah Denby, the Regulator, was not killed. The terrible blow only stunned him for a time; the gashed forehead was the only important injury. The wound was skillfully dressed by a surgeon, but it would leave a scar of double-daggers never to be obliterated from the living flesh;—the chief was a marked man for life.

The Pioneer issued an extra the next morning, giving a detailed account of the whole affair. It gave its opinion of Deadwood Dick in terms more forcible than polite, and hoped no efforts would be spared to capture this most notorious criminal of the nineteenth century.

In Mrs. Anita McKenzie Leone and Bessie found one of the sweetest little women they had ever encountered. She was still sunny and confiding, but not so sad as when we knew her before. (In No. 1 of this Series.)

Her life thus far with Justin McKenzie, had been one of perpetual happiness and marital bliss, and

not a cloud had come across the horizon of their existence, until the hanging of the supposed Prince of the Road, a short time before.

"And it seems so strange," she said, "that instead of my brother it should be yours, Leone. It is the change of sadness to your heart and joy to mine, for I cannot help but rejoice that dear Ned is safe and alive."

And Leone secretly rejoiced in the same knowledge, for her heart now beat faster when she thought of the dashing, dare-devil road-agent, or glanced at his costly token upon her engagement finger. What did it signify?

Was she engaged to an outlaw?

"I wonder when he will come to see me?" Anita went on. "I should so like to see and talk with him. He was always a good brother, though once a little harsh toward me. But, that was all owing to a misunderstanding."

"You saw him and talked with him but a short time since," put in Bessie. "That was Captain Dick who brought us."

"What! That my darling brother? Impossible!" "On the contrary, it is quite possible. He was disguised. But I fear for his safety, for he was recognized and pointed out to the Regulator chief, as we came in."

"Oh! heaven; then he is in peril. I will call Swift Fox, my Indian boy, and dispatch him to learn if he made his escape. Poor Ned—always hunted."

Swift Fox was sent on his errand, and our friends anxiously awaited his return with the news.

"I think it looks very much as if there was a prospect of your having a sister-in-law soon, Mrs. McKenzie!" observed Donald, who had noticed the diamond ring immediately, directing Anita's attention to the gleaming token.

"Indeed! Is that so, my dear?" and the little woman seemed delighted. "Well, I shall be just happy if you get Ned. Your influence ought to reform him."

"It certainly ought to," agreed Donald, a tinge of sarcasm in his tone.

"Of course it ought," assented Leone, not in the least abashed; "but I notice that there's a shoe that pinches some one's foot, and that not far away, either."

Donald flushed to the temples at the cut, and might have sworn, just a little, had there been no ladies present.

Thus they all conversed and passed away the time very pleasantly.

After about an hour's absence, Swift Fox returned and reported the daring deed of Deadwood Dick, and his attempted escape; but, as yet, nothing was known whether he had eluded the pursuing Regulators or not; therefore Anita sent him back to wait till he could find out more.

"I think the day is at hand," said Donald, "when it will become necessary for your brother to seek another field of action, if he calculates to escape death at the hands of his enemies. Already he has a name and fame extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific slope, and soon, if it cannot be accomplished by other means, the government will send on a force of military to rout him out—for the few soldiers stationed here now could not catch a disabled flea."

"I fear Ned will never desert the Black Hills, while there is life and excitement here!" said Anita. "Here, he is in his element; elsewhere, he would be lost—literally out of place."

"Well, they'll certainly make it warm for him, after this Denby recovery. He is reputed to be an old customer at fighting; and I reckon he won't fool long around such a fellow as Deadwood Dick."

"Neither he will. The next time, he'll stop a bullet instead of a knife. The mark of Deadwood Dick is on him, and his days on earth are numbered."

About dark there was a loud, rude knock at the door, and Anita, accompanied by Donald as a sort of body-guard, went to answer the summons, Leone and Bessie Audley crouching out of sight behind a great cupboard.

On opening the door, two men were found to be standing on the steps outside.

They were none others than Leone's step-father, Jasper Leslie, and her persecuting lover, Curtis Sydnor.

"Good-evenin'," saluted Leslie, while both men doffed their hats. "We called to see a young lady whom you have in your charge, Miss Leone Hawk, by name. We presume she is at liberty."

"No!" said Donald, coolly, "she is not. I do not believe she cares to see you."

"No, probably not," sneered Sydnor, sarcastically, "but that makes no difference to us. We have a little important business to transact with her, and must and shall see her!"

"But you won't, though!" declared Donald. "You will have to wait till I see her outside this door, I'm thinking."

"But I say we shall do nothing of the kind, you insolent puppy!" roared Leslie, flying into a passion. "Get yourself out of the road, and let us pass!"

"Oh! no!" retorted the cool miner, perfectly calm. "When you enter, here, you'll be apt to stop several bullets." And in his hand, as if to back his assertion, he held a small gold-mounted revolver.

Sydnor swore and so did Leslie.

"I would advise you to make yourselves pretty generally scarce," continued Yates, pulling back the hammer. "My argument of a case is always sharp and decisive, and composed of round, leaden pellets. Come! will you move away, or shall I ventilate you?"

"You have the advantage, now, curse you!" growled Sydnor, retreating down the steps, his face nearly purple with rage, "but your triumph will be short-lived. I'll have that girl if I have to murder every cursed dog in Deadwood. Do you hear, you young wretch?"

"Ay! ay!" responded Yates, with a smile of acknowledgment; "I am not deaf. If you propose paying us another visit, we will be prepared for you."

Then he closed and locked the door, and the discomfited villains turned their steps back toward the Metropolis.

Leone had been considerably alarmed, when she heard the voices of her enemies, but she became once more her lively self, when she found that they had gone.

"They mean mischief," said Anita, dubiously. "They will perhaps enlist a gang of toughs in their service, and give us trouble."

"In that case, I had better take Miss Hawk and escape into the Hills," said Donald.

"Oh! no! no! I did not speak because I fear for my safety. No; you must stay right here, and we will defend ourselves to the best of our ability."

"Yes, that we will!" cried Bessie, emphatically. "I am armed, and am a good shot; so you can count me in for at least a dozen."

A few moments later there were two raps upon the door, and by peering through a crack in the window-shutters, Anita was able to distinguish two persons standing on the steps.

Donald went to the door. One of the twain was Lieutenant Audley—the other was Ida Burton, the Valeted Queen.

"Well?" demanded the miner; "what's wanted?"

"I want my wife!" cried Audley, with a frightful oath; "so bounce her out here!"

"And I," said the Valeted Queen, bowing, "have come for my daughter, Leone! Tell her her mother is here!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW-FOUND MOTHER—CARRIED OFF.

DONALD closed the door, and went in and reported to the parties concerned, who were anxiously waiting.

"My mother!" cried Leone, in great astonishment when she learned what was the valeted woman's mission. "What can it mean? My mother was accidentally drowned in the Missouri river, years ago."

"Are you sure? There may have been some mistake."

"Ah! would to God it could be so. My step-father was my authority on the matter."

"Then, doubtless he lied to you; for if that was him at the door, awhile ago, he is not too mean for anything. Shall I admit the woman?"

"Yes. I can at least see her."

"And how about your husband, Mrs. Audley. Do you wish to see him?"

"No!" the young woman replied, scornfully. "I despise him!"

"Then, I shall not bring him in!"

"No. Send him away if you can."

The miner went back and opened the door, a cocked revolver in his hand.

"You may enter, madam," he said, addressing the Card Queen, "and you, sir," to the half-intoxicated lieutenant, "can get out of the reach of my revolver in ten seconds, or take the consequences. Come! get a-go-in. One! two—"

With a curse the baffled renegade retreated down the steps, and thence down the street, out of pistol range.

"You are a capital hand to rid yourself of nuisances!" laughed the Valeted Queen, merrily, as she followed the miner inside. "I saw you drive away Jasper Leslie, and his companion, a short time ago."

They entered the little front parlor, where Leone, Bessie and Anita were waiting.

"My child—my own darling child!" cried the valeted woman, uncovering her face, and advancing with outstretched arms. Leone gave her one quick, searching glance, and then sprang into her embrace with a glad, joyous cry. Any one had need to look but once at the faces of the two, to be assured that they were mother and daughter; for, except that her hair was dark and her general appearance older, the Card Queen was a very counterpart of Leone.

"My mother! my mother!" cried the girl, joyfully; "I believe you are she."

"Then you believe truly, my child, for I am your mother, whom you have not seen for years. At last, after many trials and much terrible suffering, I rejoice, for I have found one of my own blood to love and cherish."

And the two wept tears of grateful joy upon each other's shoulders.

After the first fond greeting was over, conversation took a turn upon another subject. Leone spoke of Jasper Leslie, and Sydnor's threat to possess her, at no matter what cost.

"The villains shall never lay a hand upon you, dear!" the Card Queen said, reassuringly. "I have the power to arrest them both, and once they know who I am, they will not offer, I think, to molest you further."

It was now quite dark, outside, and a heavy rain was falling. But few pedestrians were abroad, and it looked probable that there was nothing to be feared from Leslie and his companion in crime, until another day.

But this was a mistake. After supper had been partaken of and all were seated comfortably in the little front parlor, loud shouts were heard from out in the wild wet night, and peering out of the window Donald beheld a score of rough-looking fellows coming up the street.

They were headed by the two villains, Sydnor and Leslie, and many were armed with long poles and torches.

"They're coming!" exclaimed the miner, setting his teeth together with an ominous click. "We must repulse them or surrender—which?"

"We'll fight, of course!" cried Leone's new-found mother, fiercely. "I have two perforating instruments, here,"—and she displayed a couple of handsome revolvers—"with which I can do good service. Death to Jasper Leslie, I say, and then the same to his tools!"

Deadwood Dick found no difficulty in eluding his Regulator pursuers, and in two hours he was at his mountain stronghold. Here he found Calamity Jane and his band, as he had left them, enjoying a good rest preparatory to the great siege that they expected was soon to come.

"I am glad you have got back," Calamity said, "for that takes a burden from my shoulders. I like well enough to boss my own ranch, but when it comes to bossing somebody else's, I ain't nowhar. How did you make out?"

"I made out of Deadwood in telegraph time!" laughed the Prince of the Road, grimly. "I got chased by a swarm of vengeful hornets, but I soon escaped 'em w/out being stung."

"Regulators, were they?"

"Reckon they were. I tumbled over old Uriah Denby, and marked him so I'd know him the next time we met; kicked Fred Audley out of tune, and then came away in double-quick time!"

"What did you kick Fred Audley for?" questioned a number of the band, who had gathered about.

"I judge he needs something worse than kicking, the accursed traitor!" and the young chief's brow grew as black as a thunder-cloud. "To him you owe your betrayal, for he is the traitor. Carlos Cambre, you are henceforth to fill his position as lieutenant!"

"Hurra!" yelled the road-agents, in unison. "Three cheers for our new lieutenant! Long life to Carlos Cambre, and death to Audley the traitor!"

"Ay! ay, my lads; that's the ticket to vote!" cried Deadwood Dick, pleased to see Cambre so heartily accepted. As for the young Spaniard, he scarcely knew what to say about the matter.

"Audley is the last one I should have suspected out of your hand," said Calamity, after she and the young chief had been left standing alone, the road-agents having retired to their cabin. "Do you think his wife is implicated?"

"Nary! Bessie is a true little woman, and scorns treachery and deceit above all else. No; Audley is the nigger in the bush; and he may as well speak for his coffin, for his days are numbered!"

Just then a pigeon, circling around in the air overhead, attracted Deadwood Dick's attention.

"Look! it's a messenger from my reporter at the Metropolis. What news can it bring, I wonder?" He was soon answered. After describing many graceful curves and circles, the beautiful bird slowly descended and alighted upon the chief's shoulder. It was of snowy white color, and under its left wing was tied a small piece of folded white paper.

Detaching this, Deadwood Dick glanced over it hastily.

"Flew!" he muttered, setting his teeth together, firmly. Then he handed the message to Calamity, while he strode rapidly off toward the larger cabin.

There were but few words of it:

"Come; you're needed. Gang o' toughs goin' to tack McKenzie's; Denby also started after you with fifty men. Look out."

In a very few moments Deadwood Dick and his men had left their mountain retreat, and were dashing through the intricacies of the mountains, in the face of the night's drizzling and blustering storm.

On came the gang of men toward the cottage, their hoarse yells and shouts of laughter calculated to inspire the hearer with dread and terror. They were mainly composed of the class of bummers and bruisers that hover about all mining towns, and pick up a living by the strength of their muscle, or lightness of their fingers.

"I don't like the looks of them!" said Anita, dubiously. "They are of the worst class of men in Deadwood, and have no respect for life or person. God pity a woman that falls into their hands, for they are very brutes."

"I think we have nothing to fear!" replied Donald, calmly. "A few telling shots will send them off, a-kinin', bet your pile on that. I've faced just such music before."

"And it's easy to tell that you have a brave heart!" praised the Queen. "You are not afraid to fight, and that just suits me to a T. Now, let me tell you, the best way to drive off this gang is to drop the two villains in the lead. You cover Curtis Sydnor, the portly scoundrel, and I'll do for that old white-haired wretch whom a cruel father once forced me to marry."

"What! You surely will not murder your own husband!" exclaimed Anita, in horror.

"Yes—were he a thousand times my husband," was the woman's fierce rejoinder. "He is an accursed viper on the face of the earth, and surely God will not hold me to answer for ridding the world of such a wretch as he. Ha!"

This latter exclamation was caused by the sudden disappearance of both Leslie and Sydnor. Whether they had gone so suddenly was hard to tell; but certain it was that they were no longer in sight. Their gang of ruffians, however, came howling on, and at last halted in front of the cottage.

"What has become of them?" asked Leone, anxiously, referring to the two missing men—her hated enemies.

"They've probably hidden themselves, somewhere out of bullet-range, where they can watch their tools take us," said Donald, grimly. "Hark! let's hear what that big tough has to say."

One of the grizzly crowd, a very giant in size, by

the way, was yelling and gesticulating, evidently trying to attract the attention of those inside.

"Hello! what do you want?" cried Donald, through an open slit in the shutter.

"Cum out hayer, durm yer old socks—cum out an' see," replied the giant. "Yer a drat-hanged coward, ye be, or ye wouldn't be afeared tew show up. Cum, d'ye heer? Ar' ye cummin' out, or shall we cum in?"

"Maybe ye'd better come in!" was the decision of the miner, "that is, if you've any desire to stop a small cannonade of round lead. If you haven't, you'd better get back to your respective ranches, take my word for it."

"Haw! haw! d'ye heer thet, my pigeons? The pilgrim actually hes got the cheek to advise us w'at ter do. Jes's as tho' we angelic flutterers will obey his dicktashun! Not much, Mary Annar. I say, you cuss in thar?"

"Well—"
"You can't know who I am, I reckon, or ye wouldn't be quite so fresh. I am a double-distilled torpeder o' nitro-glycerin, an' when ye touch me off sunthin's got to bust, bet yer dirty socks. My geographical title ar' Jesus MacGinness, tho' I ain't no Irisher!"

"Jesus MacGinness! Lordy, what a handle," laughed Donald, turning to the ladies. "Certainly the ones that christened him that Scriptural handle could not have looked this far into the future." Then, aloud, to the giant outside: "Well, Mr. Jesus MacGinness, what will you have?"

"Great cats o' Barbary! I reckon you ought to know. We war hired to cum hyar and git a gal as you've got caged up in thar, an' git her we will, bet the best pair o' boots in town. Now, pilgrim, bizness is bizness with us, an' we'll give ye percisely five wiggles of an elephant's Saratogy trunk ter perdooce that gal in. At the terminus uv that peeryod ef the critter hain't hove in sight, we'll deliberately perceed to make patent-baled kindling wood out o' thet shanty!"

"Correct!" retorted Donald; "and now, in turn, I'll give you and your crowd four minutes by the watch to get out of pistol-range. All that are wise will not neglect to skin out."

"Nary a budge will we!" shouted back Jesus MacGinness.

Then for a moment silence ensued.

"Shall we fire upon them?" asked Bessie, peering out of a knot-hole. "I could just salt that big chap nicely from here."

"No. We will not open on them till they make some show of violence, then blaze away, and make every bullet count."

"Listen!" cried Anita, in alarm. "Some one is pounding at the back door."

"You keep watch in front, and I'll go see who it is," replied Donald, and off he went, revolver in hand.

The back door opened off into an entry or back porch, and the person knocking was evidently in this.

"Hello!" said the miner, sternly. "Who's out there, and what do you want?"

"Hist!" came back the reply, in a shrill whisper, through the key-hole. "Don't attract attention here, but let me in."

"The deuce I will. What'll I do that for? Who's out there, and what do you want?"

"Sh! you'll have them tought around here if you don't shut up. Let me in. I come from Deadwood Dick to help you. He and more of the boys will be along soon. Come! let me in, if you're goin' to."

Yates had a cool head on him and never did things in a rush. He always endeavored to see his way clear before acting. Therefore he did not immediately open the door, but searched around and found a knot-hole, through which to obtain a glimpse of the gent outside. At last he was successful, and though the gloom was dense, he was able to distinguish a man, brawny and heavy set, attired in mountaineer costume, and masked. In all probability he was a genuine road-agent.

"Sposin' you tell us your name!" proposed Donald, as he opened the door.

"Certainly," assented the man, entering hurriedly. "It is Kirk Graves; but listen! the toughs have attacked the shanty. Lead the way front, and we'll give them a blizzard. I hope the captain will hurry along with the rest o' the gang; he'll soon scatter this yelling crowd!"

Without another word Donald did as directed, for he heard the ruffians attacking the front door with poles and clubs. He had taken the precaution to bar it strongly, however, and it stood the fierce assault without flinching. The ladies were somewhat alarmed to see a stranger in their midst, but Donald speedily dispelled any doubt they may have had.

"Tis a member of Deadwood Dick's band," he explained, "come to help us keep off the devils till Dick can put in an appearance in person."

"And here goes for a shot!" cried Graves, firing through a knot-hole into the crowd. "Bully, I dropped one gallus tough first shot. Whoop! that makes 'em scratch their ideas up. Here's for another!" and again the road-agent's pistol cracked with deadly effect.

Bessie, the Card Queen, and Yates had also opened fire through the slats of the blinds, and the ruffians were dropping off rapidly.

They too resorted to fire-arms, and their bullets came crashing through the thin boards that formed the walls of the building.

Suddenly, Leone, who was occupied in watching the others fire, saw Graves reel away from his loop-hole, and stagger across the room, blood oozing from a wound in his forehead.

"Take me where I can get water," he said, reaching out blindly. "Don't tell the rest I'm wounded."

Quickly Leone seized him by the arm and led him out through the kitchen into the back porch, where there was a drove well. Pumping some fresh water, she was about to turn to bathe the road-agent's forehead, when she was suddenly seized in a stout pair of arms, a shawl thrown over her head to prevent any screams from her lips; then she felt herself being borne rapidly away. She struggled but could not break from the iron grasp that held her; she screamed for assistance, but the cloak effectually muffled her cries. She was powerless;—and in the hands of her enemies, who were taking her—where?

Ah! that she knew!
But it was impossible to form any idea; she knew nothing only that she was being carried on—on—on!

CHAPTER XV.

DEADWOOD DICK TAKES A HAND.

The absence of Leone was not noticed, nor that of the pretended road-agent, until later, so busy were the others engaged in loading and firing.

One by one the attacking ruffians fell—some dead, others more or less injured. At last their number became so diminished, that they turned and made a dash toward Deadwood. But even in this they were baffled.

As if waiting the moment, madly down through the pouring street of the rain-soaked town, dashed a cavalcade of horsemen, headed by a grim black rider, as black as the wild wet night itself; madly on they rode, and then came a collision with the retreating ruffians; groans and furious curses, the bang! bang! of revolvers, the clash of steel; and high above the roar of the pelting storm, rings out a wild shriek of laughter, followed by a mighty shout from o'er a score of powerful throats:

"Hurra! three cheers for Deadwood Dick! Vengeance, and double-daggers!"

For the first, crowds of excited men begin to issue from the saloons to learn the cause of the disturbance in the wild black night. But when a whisper reaches their ears of "Deadwood Dick," they pause and consider what is best to do.

Certainly they don't care to tackle this ghostly scourge, in darkness more profound than the shades of Egypt. Uriah Denby and his crowd, the proper men to attend to such business, are off somewhere in the mountains, searching for this very disreputable Richard. Why, then, shall these legitimate citizens of Deadwood brave a pouring rain to fight road-agents, so long as said road-agents don't come too close for personal safety?

No reason is there, argue they; and go back to the saloons *en masse*, glad to get inside where all is dry, except what you pay for in the shape of "tarantler juice."

The battle between the ruffians and road-agents is of but short duration, and soon Deadwood Dick and his men dash up to the cottage, to learn the damage done there. But only the young chief dismounts and is admitted; the rest sweep on and off into the dense shadows, like the dark wild spirits they are. Deadwood Dick was admitted into the cottage without delay.

"You are welcome!" cried Donald, grasping the Prince's hand. "You come, however, just when we were successful in driving off the enemy."

"Yes, so I perceived. But I could not get here any sooner."

"You were soon enough to finish what we left, I imagine, by the sounds of conflict. Your man, Graves, said you were coming. By the way, Bessie, where is the fellow?"

"I don't know. I've been paying more attention to my shooting than anything else."

"It's deuced dark, seems to me. Get a light, Mrs. McKenzie. Maybe the man's been shot down and we knew nothing about it."

Anita, who had been clinging to Deadwood Dick, nearly in raptures to once more see him alive and well, groped around, and soon produced a lamp, which she succeeded in lighting.

"What did you say about my man Graves?" demanded Richard. "I've no one in my crowd of that name."

"What! You must be mistaken. A man, masked like your men, came and clamored for admittance, just before the fight began, saying he came from you, and that you and your fellows would be along soon. We let him in, and he fought against the roughs."

"I'll wager a thousand the chap was an impostor, and you have been fooled!" cried Dick, his tone betraying alarm. "Where is Leone? Quick, Anita—the light!"

"Leone! Leone!" cried the Card Queen. The lamp was seized, and its rays flashed around the room.

"Yes, by Heaven! she is gone!" Dick exclaimed. "You're all a pack of brainless idiots! You've let her enemies snatch her right out from under your noses!"

A cry of horror went up all around.

"And that pretended road-agent is the abductor of my child!" cried Mrs. Hawk, or, as we have known her, the Card Queen. "No doubt the man was Curtis Sydnor."

But Sydnor had side-whiskers, where this fellow had none," said Donald.

"The shears would rid him of his beard," Dick vouchsafed, pacing up and down the floor, excitedly. "It was no doubt one of the young lady's enemies. But, there's no use crying over spilt milk. She's gone, and that's the long and short of it."

"And we must find her!" decided Donald, grimly. "We must begin the search now, and not give it over until we have her again in our possession."

"Which is easier said than done!" replied the Prince of the Road. "The gal's in the power of her enemies, and they're going to freeze to her like a

crab to a bather's toe. Only cunning matched against cunning, is going to have any good result."

"Her captors will not be apt to remain long in Deadwood, with her," said Mrs. Hawk, thoughtfully. "They will most likely take the morning stage for Cheyenne, *en route* for Texas."

"In that case, I think I can safely promise you the restoration of your child!" said Deadwood Dick, reassuringly. "The out-stage will carry a large consignment of gold, and by stopping it, I can doubtless hit two birds with one stone. So I will now bid you adieu. You probably will have no more trouble, as the young lady was the cause of this we have had. Without doubt, your plan, madam, is the one Leone's enemies will adopt; so I will see to it that the stage is stopped, and if we find your daughter she shall be safely returned to you. Now, then, good-evening, one and all!"

"Ned! Ned!" Anita cried, "you are not going away to stay so long again? You will come back to visit me, won't you?"

"Yes, little sister," and the young chief kissed her fondly. "I shall drop in to see you, occasionally, unless the Reg's get my scalp. I have not found time to ask you how you enjoy married life, but I'm certain you cannot be otherwise than happy with such a man as Justin McKenzie for a husband. He is truly a noble fellow. But I must not tarry. Good-by!"

And the next moment the door had closed behind Deadwood Dick.

Outside, in the wild, pouring night, he mounted his black charger, who was growing impatient at the delay, and away down through the gulch city of gold dashed the weird horse and rider, at breakneck speed, and no one was abroad to check his course.

After his departure, those at the McKenzie cottage talked over the events of the evening, when it was proposed that Donald should pay a visit to the Metropolitan and other saloons, and learn, if he could, something about the whereabouts of Sydnor and Leslie. This he at once agreed to do, and wrapping himself in a huge army coat—the property of McKenzie—and arming himself thoroughly, he set out on his errand.

The first saloon he entered was the Metropolitan.

The rainy night had drawn in a large crowd, but, under the stern eye of the manager, an old California veteran, everything was passing off mildly, considering the crowd, the time and the locality. Occasionally there was a quarrel and a knock-down, over a game of cards, or some unlucky pilgrim got an eye gouged, or an ear chewed off, for interfering with a partner upon the dancing-floor. But such occurrences are so frequent as not to cause any particular commotion.

Donald wandered about in the great saloon for an hour or more, but saw no one answering to the description of either Sydnor or Leslie. Their names were upon the books, but they were absent from the assembled throng.

And where were they?

This question Donald was unable to answer. That they were not in the Metropolitan he was quite positive. He had narrowly scanned the faces of each and every man present, but none were of that type peculiar to the two villains he sought.

"I judge there's little use looking further!" he muttered, going out once more into the storm, "but I suppose I may as well drop into one or two of the other dens, to pass away time."

He accordingly did so, but without any satisfactory result. Nothing of Leone's captors was to be seen, nor could inquiry further his search, for outside of the "Met" no one knew anything of the men in question.

So about midnight he went back to the cottage. Anita and Bessie were still up and waiting, but Mrs. Hawk, they said, had gone out, half an hour before, and had not yet returned.

"I reckon we needn't worry about her," Donald said, taking off his rain-soaked cloak. "She has roughed it enough to know how to take care of herself. Shouldn't wonder if she's thought of some place where she might find Leone's captors."

"She'll give them trouble, if she should find them!" exclaimed Bessie, decidedly. "She has got plenty of grit."

In the meantime where was Leone?

The Metropolitan was a hotel, in addition to its saloon and dance-house, and in an upper room two men sat at a common deal-table, upon which a lamp was burning. The room was bare and cheerless, its only furniture being the table and two chairs occupied by the two men, and a low, uninviting bed in a further corner, upon which lay a young woman, apparently in deep sleep.

The men in question were Curtis Sydnor and Leone's step-father, Jasper Leslie. Sydnor was still attired in the disguise in which he had visited the McKenzie cottage, all except the mask, which lay before him on the table. He had sheared off his beard, and looked rough and grizzly.

"The plan worked capital!" he was saying, bringing his hand down on the table heavily. "I never did a better piece of acting in my life. No one suspected my identity, and that bullet that grazed my forehead must have been sent me by the devil, as an aid in perfecting my arrangements."

"And you'd never thought of such a thing ef I hadn't told ye!" growled Leslie, running his skeleton fingers through his long white hair. "The gal'd bin in the cottage yit, ef ef hadn't bin for me."

"Bah! you needn't brag, you old bone-yard. I've got the gal, and that's all I care. You can go to thunder, now, if you like."

"Not till you give me over the mortgage," replied Leslie, firmly. "Give me that, and I'll agree not to trouble you any more."

"Will you wait till you get it?" sneered the other, evilly, triumph gleaming in the glance of his blood-shot eye. "I rather reckon you will. I've got the gal, and you didn't help to git her, either; and I've got the mortgage, too—"

"You lie, Curtis Sydnor!" cried Leone, sitting up on the bed. "When you were carrying me away from my friends, I worked my hand into the inside pocket of your hunting-shirt, and abstracted a packet of papers—"

"By heaven, girl, the mortgage was among the papers!"

"So I thought at the time, and, unbeknown to you, I tore the whole lot all into little bits, and sent them off on the wind. Ha! ha! ha!"

"For a moment the baffled schemer looked like an infuriated wild beast, in his rage."

"You wretch. You cursed little imp of the devil!" he roared, drawing a knife from his belt. "I've half a notion to cut your throat from ear to ear."

"Go ahead and cut, if you want to!" retorted Leone, defiantly. "But it won't help matters a bit. The mortgage is gone, and you cannot get the Hawk property; it is mine, and no earthly power can take it away from me, for my mother is alive, and will help me to fight you."

"Bah! your mother made food for fishes in the bottom of the Missouri, years ago!" sneered Sydnor. "After you marry me the property is mine, no matter if you have a dozen mothers living."

"But I won't marry you, you insolent vagabond," retorted the girl, firmly. "True, you have succeeded in getting me into your possession, but there is no law in the land that will compel me to wed such a brute as you."

"Oh! never mind, my daisy. I'll see to it that all comes as I desire. I'll take you down into Texas, and there I'll so fix you that you will be only too willing to marry me."

"I fear not your villainous threats, Curtis Sydnor. I have a mother and friends here in Deadwood, and you know the old-time saying, about the slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. If you get me away without any trouble, it will be a great wonder to me."

"Don't fear. I'll manage that all right. When your friends come to search for you, they'll find you missing!"

There was little sleep at the McKenzie cottage that night. All felt anxious about Leone, and discussed the probabilities of her whereabouts, at length.

Anita had great faith that her brother would be successful in recovering her, for he so seldom failed in any undertaking which he set about to accomplish.

"Did you see anything of my husband, when you were out?" Bessie asked.

"No—not that I remember of. Perhaps he has hidden out of the way, fearing the vengeance of the road-agents?"

"It will avail him little to hide. Sooner or later his death will be the result of his treachery."

"You will be a widow, then?"

The miner had taken quite an interest in pretty Bessie, since finding that there was no hope left for his winning Leone.

"Yes, I suppose so, but better so than to be tied to a man like Fred Audley. I believed him to be a man when I married him, but found out that he was a brute."

Toward daylight, Donald started out again into the rainy morning, and made his way to the stage-stand, to see if possible whether or not the captors of Leone went off in the Cheyenne coach. But he found that the stage had departed over two hours before; and inquiry gained him no news, for no one knew anything about the passengers, or their number.

Swiftly down through the black mountain canyons tore the noisy Cheyenne stage, with its plunging, snorting horses, six in number, and the swearing Jehu, who managed the lines with one hand, and the incessantly cracking whip with the other. It is an hour before day-dawn, and in the black, wooded mountains is the very darkest part of night.

The Jehu is a veteran on the Deadwood trail, and no other than Bill McGucken, who probably has hauled more humans into the Black Hills metropolis than any other "howler" on the road.

And Bill knows his business, too, as has formerly been evidenced.

On—on tears the jolting, overloaded coach; on—on plunge the fierce, spirited horses; then, in a darkest part of a dark, deep gulch, McGucken reins in his "prancers," and yells down into the stage:

"All you'ts got any tin may's well be gittin' it out, fer we've arriv' at Deadwood Dick's toll-gate. Yander's his gang now, comin' through the pass!"

True enough, Deadwood Dick and his men came riding leisurely into view, revolvers drawn in hand.

McGucken had been long enough "stagin' it" to know what their coming meant.

CHAPTER XVI. CONCLUSION.

STRAIGHT ON came the road-agents, fearlessly and boldly, until they had surrounded the stage.

McGucken was down upon his knees on his box, his hands clasped in mute supplication, for the poor fool really believed he was in the presence of the spirit of Deadwood Dick. The passengers in the coach did not offer to fire upon the enemy, for they well knew that such a proceeding would insure their own death.

"Get up, you crazy loon!" cried Deadwood Dick, riding to the front of the coach and giving McGucken a crack alongside the ear with the butt of the stage whip. "What in the Old Nick is the matter with you?"

William arose, forthwith, fully satisfied that there

was more that was earthly than spiritual of the one who had given him the blow.

"Yes, yer honor," he said, trembling, as he beheld the stern gaze of the young chief centered upon him. "I heer ye say et."

"Correct. You're generally a pretty fair sort o' pilgrim, Billiam, and I can't afford to be hard on ye. How much tin have you got on board, tonight?"

"Nary, capten, unless et be in the treasure-box, an' I couldn't say the amount ye'll find there."

"Well, we'll proceed to investigate. Boys, blow open the shell, half a dozen of you, while I attend to taking up a collection for the foreign missions!"

Then the Prince rode back to the coach door and opened it.

"Gentlemen," he said, politely, "I would request that you step outside of the stage. Upon the impulse of the moment, I have decided not to relieve you of your valuables, for I doubt if there is a man leaves Deadwood overstocked with riches; besides, we shall realize heavily from the treasure-box. If you will all step out for a moment, I will guarantee that none of your effects will suffer."

At this unusual proposal there was a general scramble to get out, and as one by one the passengers emerged through the low doorway, Deadwood Dick scanned them narrowly, by aid of a lighted torch held in the hand of Lieutenant Cambre.

At last they were evidently all out, a dozen of them all told, for the most part miners who had become disgusted, and were bidding adieu to the magic city.

"Are all outside, gentlemen?"

"No! thar's a young gal in thar's 's bin drunk ever since we started!" vouchsafed one old fellow, "and these here pilgrims, sur," pointing to two of the passengers, who were attired in citizens' dress, "ar' the ones as fetched her inter ther stage."

"Then they are our game. Seize 'em, mates!" cried Richard, covering the two wretches with his revolvers.

"A couple of you also bring the young lady out of the coach. She is not drunk, but has been drugged by these two scheming demons."

Sydnor and Leslie, for it was the two enemies of Leone, were seized and securely bound; then Leone was brought from the inside of the coach and laid on the grass, beside the stage-track. She was in a deathly stupor, that might easily have been mistaken for an intoxicated sleep.

Deadwood Dick dismounted and knelt by her side. He saw that she would soon wear off the effects of the opiate if left in the open air. It was still raining briskly, so he covered her body with his blanket, and let the rain fall upon her upturned face. While he was thus engaged, there were three pistol-shots in rapid succession, and the audible sound of as many bodies falling upon the ground.

Springing to his feet, he perceived at a glance that the villains Sydnor and Leslie had been shot; also, one of the passengers lay outstretched upon the greensward, with blood oozing from the left temple, and a still smoking revolver clutched in the stiffening fingers, to show the origin of the bloody tragedy.

Furthermore, he recognized in that passenger no less a person than our heroine's mother, the Veiled Queen, whom he had seen at the cottage, and also many previous times at the "Met."

"Great heaven! this is a horrible thing, gentlemen. Have any of you passengers any knowledge of this trio?" asked Dick, bending over the dead woman—for she was dead, the last bullet from her revolver having crashed through her brain. The false whiskers she wore had partly fallen off, and her long hair was disarranged.

"Reckon none of us knows anything about 'em!" replied the miner, who had spoken before. "They all got inter the stage at Deadwood, and that's all we know."

"Well, so be it. All three are dead, and thank God I have not their blood upon my hands. I shall bury them, here, and that is all I can do. Mates, have you done with the treasure-box?"

"Ay! ay! We've cleaned it out."

"Very good. You passengers may now enter and the stage can proceed. But, mind you, Bill McGucken, not a word of this to the Cheyenne or Deadwood authorities!"

A general scramble was made for the coach, by the overjoyed passengers, and in a moment it was rolling noisily away through the gulch.

When it was out of sight and hearing, Deadwood Dick turned to his men.

"Mates," he said, "it is our duty to bury these dead ones, ere we depart. Dig two graves in the clayey soil, yonder, and I will search this woman, for she may possess papers that will prove valuable to this young lady, here, who is her daughter."

The road-agents made haste to obey, while their youthful leader rifled the pockets of the dead Card Queen. He found some valuable rings, a couple of bank books, and a small roll of manuscript, that was evidently freshly written. That was all.

The graves were soon finished, and after the bodies were well wrapped in blankets, they were lowered into their coffinless tomb; then they were covered up forever from the sight of man.

By this time, day was breaking in the east, and the rain had ceased to fall, with all promises for a clear, warm day.

"We must needs be moving," said the Prince, glancing at Leone who had not yet returned to consciousness. "Day is almost upon us, and it is not desirable to be visible too much, being as the Regulators are abroad."

"Then shall we return to the strong-hold?" asked Lieutenant Cambre.

"No, Denby and his men are likely up in that

region, and I don't wish to meet them, if it can be avoided."

"Well said, captain, for surely enough blood has been spilt by us, to insure us a warm reception into the devil's kingdom. Where, then, shall we go?"

"To the place Calamity Jane calls Golden Bar. She directed me so I can easily find it, and there we can lie low for a time. When another night comes, perhaps there will be a wedding, if the bride is willing."

Accordingly the road-agents all mounted, and Leone was handled tenderly into the arms of Deadwood Dick, after which the cavalcade rode away from the fatal spot. Under the young chief's lead, they threaded the intricate mountain gorges, and hours later, when the glad warm sunlight was flooding the earth with a beautiful radiance they reached the novel entrance to Golden Bar, and rode, single file, into the cavern.

Calamity was there, evidently awaiting their coming, and bade all make themselves at home and guests of her hospitality.

"I was afraid you'd got into difficulty," she said, arranging a pile of blankets whereon to lay the senseless maiden. "Old Denby and his crowd went up toward your stronghold, last night, after dark, and I didn't know but you might have encountered them."

"Oh! no. I fought shy of them, because I did not want to raise any more disturbance, for awhile. Deadwood's whole population might turn out after me."

"Ha! ha! but they'd never find you, here. Golden Bar is a secure retreat from all the world. How is it that you have Leone with you? I thought she was in Deadwood, at your sister's."

Richard explained in a very few words, and then Leone was laid upon the couch of blankets, while Calamity set about applying restoratives. But her efforts were unavailing.

The maiden lay as one in a deep, deathly slumber, breathing easily, yet appearing to arouse but a little. An expression of peaceful rest was upon her features, bespeaking the fact that she felt no pain.

Calamity had some little knowledge of doctoring, and medicines; and as she sat and watched the beautiful sleeper, a dark look passed from her eyes—a shadow flashed over her features, of doubt and anxiety.

"What is it?" asked Deadwood Dick, who had been watching, narrowly.

Calamity shook her head.

"It's mighty strange," she said, grimly, her eyes staring. "I never saw chloroform or ether hang on like this. I am afraid that—"

She paused, in evident hesitation.

"What!—afraid of what?" cried the road-agent, in alarm.

"Afraid that the wretches, finding that there was no hopes o' carryin' her off, have poisoned her."

"Great heaven! girl, you cannot be in earnest. She poisoned!" Richard knelt down beside the senseless idol of his heart, pale and wild-eyed. She poisoned; doomed to die when he had just learned to worship the very ground she trod on? No! it was not—must not be so! She would return to life, to smile once more upon him, road-agent, criminal, and outcast though he was.

"It may not be so," replied Calamity, "but it's more'n likely. The cusses war bound to have the gal for some purpose or other; I reckon it was on account o' property. They were not too good to do any thing. Maybe she'll rouse up, but I wouldn't swear to it. At any rate, an' our will tell, for if it's poison, she'll die inside o' that!"

Tears fell thick and fast from the eyes of Deadwood Dick. Had it been his own sister lying there before him, and she dying as Leone was, he could not have felt worse. He had become a hater of women, from the time Alice Terry had refused him, until he had met this fair girl, when his reckless heart had again felt the thrill of love, this time tenfold stronger than ever before.

The road-agents gathered around, in respect for their sorrowing leader, for they loved him even better than themselves. He had won a firm place in their hearts by his courage, daring and fitness to command, and his sorrow was theirs.

"I think you have little need to weep, Captain Dick," said Cambre, the lieutenant, kneeling on the opposite side of the sleeping beauty. "If it is only the effects of chloroform or ether, it will undoubtedly wear off, for it rarely kills a person of the robust build and health this young woman appears to enjoy."

"I am well satisfied et's pizen," said Calamity, confidently.

"Well, in that case, I believe I can fetch her around. Wait till I return," replied Cambre, and turning, he hurried from the cavern. In ten minutes he came back, with a handful of reddish weeds, that the Sioux Indians call *cabrai*—meaning "the fire-plant."

Procuring a kettle from Calamity, he proceeded to steep the herbs into a strong, unpleasant-smelling liquor, a glassful of which was forced down the maiden's throat. In ten minutes more she had vomited up the emetic, and with it came a greenish sediment that was in the first stages of fermentation.

"She was poisoned, true enough," the lieutenant said, "but she will now recover, I'll guarantee."

"And I owe you another debt of gratitude!" cried Deadwood Dick, grasping his hand warmly. "May God reward you in a way that I cannot."

Leone now rapidly showed signs of returning consciousness, and inside of an hour she was sitting up, fully aroused, with a clear comprehension of what was going on about her.

At her lover's request, she related what had transpired from the time she was stolen from the cottage

by Sydnor, until they had forcibly drugged her in the room at the Metropolitan saloon, preparatory to taking her aboard the stage.

Dick then explained to her all about how he had rescued her from the stage; how her mother, disguised as a passenger, had killed Sydnor and Leslie, and then herself; and how they were given a decent burial on the spot whereon they died.

Leone cried bitterly, at first, over the loss of her new-found mother; but grief, naturally, was of short duration for one she had so briefly known.

"This roll of manuscript I found in the pocket of the Card Queen's dress, and thinking it might relate to you, I brought it along," said Deadwood Dick, giving it and the jewelry to her.

As soon as she could control her emotions, she read the papers, but said nothing concerning their contents.

The day passed very quickly away, and before any one was scarcely aware of the fact, the shades of night came creeping into the cavern.

While Calamity Jane was roasting a huge piece of venison for the evening meal, and the road-agents were in another portion of the Golden Bar, caring for the horses, Deadwood Dick called Leone one side. He was not wearing his mask, and looked really handsome, despite the somberness of his attire.

"Leone—Miss Hawk," he said, taking her hand in his, "I am ready now to receive your answer. I see you still wear my ring on the finger where I placed it, and this makes me hope that you have concluded to become my bride."

The young woman was silent for a moment, apparently considering. At last she looked up, her eyes meeting his, searchingly.

"Dick—for I want to call you that—I do not know what answer to make. The death of my mother has left me without a relative, that I know of—alone in the world. I will be frank with you, and say that I love you, but when it comes to marrying you, there is the question: Shall I or shall I not?"

"If you love me, darling—and I surely do love you—why let any question of the kind arise? We can be supremely happy together, and is that not enough? I own a gold claim at Crook City which this year will realize me ten thousand dollars. This is my own."

"I would not care for poverty, so long as I love you," she replied, nestling in the clasp of his strong arms, and allowing his lips to meet hers in a passionate, loving kiss. "But, you are an outlaw—a man forever doomed to be hunted from place to place by the minions of justice. We should never know a moment's peace, together."

"Fshaw! you take a wrong-sided view of the matter," said the young Prince, kissing her again.

"Have no fear but what we shall be happy and live in comfort and luxury. I shall not always cling to the road; already the day is dawning, when the Black Hills gold excitement shall sink into that semi-oblivion that you will find in the mining districts of Colorado and California."

Then shall the world know Deadwood Dick no more, and Edward Harris will quit the West for his old Eastern home where he has yet a fair record and can start in life anew.

"And not till then?"

"Not till then, dearest."

"Then I would rather not marry you."

"You don't love me!"

"Oh! yes, I do; but—"

"But rather than marry a road-agent you would sacrifice your love?"

"No, Dick; I will marry you, no matter how much I may be in the wrong. I hope we shall neither of us ever regret it."

"I am sure we will not, darling. This very night I will go to Deadwood for a preacher, to join us in the bonds of wedlock. I shall also bring along my sister and Audley's wife to be with you. Is this agreeable, sweetest?"

"It is, Dick, and I am so happy," murmured the blushing girl. "It seems that there is no other power so divinely exquisite as love."

And Leone was right. What man or woman who has "been through the mill," will deny that their love-making was the sweetest, rarest moments of their lives?

After lingering awhile longer, and exchanging vows of eternal love and constancy, the happy pair returned to where Calamity already had the roast supper in waiting. It was a tempting, juicy haunch of deer, rare-done, and the way the hungry road-agents let into it was a caution to animals of the *cervus* species to fight shy of Golden Bar.

After the meal, Deadwood Dick ordered his horse, and prepared to depart.

"Where now?" asked Calamity, rolling up a cigarette. "It's dangerous, bein' abroad these times, you recollect."

"Yes, I know; but never fear for me. It is yet to be truthfully said that Deadwood Dick was ever caught napping. As to where I'm going, it's to Deadwood. I shall return with a gospel-singer, if one can be found, and Miss Hawk, here, will then become your Princess, as I am your Prince!"

A thundering cheer went up from the highwaymen, for Leone was generally admired by them.

So saying, Deadwood Dick quitted the cavern and rode away into the starlit night.

Perry Pennypacker was about the only ordained minister of the Gospel in the delectable magic city.

He had come from the Granite State of Maine, with a view to establishing a church and Christianizing Deadwood sinners; but on his arrival and review of the lambs of which he had calculated to be the guarding shepherd, he changed his mind, and went to panning out gold, a mile above Deadwood, at a dollar and a half a day.

To-night he was wending his way through the gulch

at a late hour, on the way to his boarding-place—late, in consequence of his paying a friendly visit at too many of the saloons, that are pitched down all the way to Elizabeth. And being a tolerable singer, Mr. Pennypacker was warbling forth on the still night air snatches from good old gospel hymns.

Suddenly his path was blockaded by a man, on a black horse, and holding a pair of cocked sixes in his grasp.

The man was Deadwood Dick.

"Waal!" demanded the man from Maine, staring hard, "what might you be wanting with me, my son?"

"Are you Perry Pennypacker?"

"I am, indeed, my son."

"And do you sling gospel, for odd jobs?"

"Yea, my son; I occasionally serve the Lord in the manner you allude to."

"Then you're the old hoss I'm wanting. D'ye know my caliber?"

"How, my son?"

"Do you know my name, I say?"

"Nay, my son. I have not the honor of your acquaintance. I suppose, however, you are one of the lambs of the Lord's flock, are you not?"

"Oh! yes, without doubt," laughed the young chief. "My handle is Deadwood Dick."

"The devil!" gasped the minister.

"No; only a representative of that distinguished gentleman," assured Richard. "But the long and short of it is, you old hummer, I want to get legally tied to a female; so I'll give you fifty dollars to come up and do the job. Eh?"

Pennypacker considered. At a dollar and a half per diem, it would take him over a month to make fifty.

"Done! I'm your pickle!" he decided, heaving away his tools. "Lead on."

Deadwood Dick first bound and blindfolded the fellow and then helped him onto a horse that he had waiting close at hand. Then the strangely assorted pair rode away.

Early on the following morning Deadwood Dick, accompanied by Donald, Anita and Bessie, and the minister, arrived at Golden Bar.

They were received with shouts of welcome by the road-agents. First, in order, came a splendid game-breakfast; then the wedding ceremony of Richard and Leone, in which the Reverend Mr. Pennypacker acquitted himself very creditably. And thus were the hero of the road, and the heroine of the Hills, made man and wife, and it was the congratulatory wish of all present, that they might ever live happily together.

After the ceremony, Leone gave some explanations concerning herself and family history. Her mother had, while young, married a wealthy planter named Garry Hawk. When he had become the father of two children (Gerald and Leone) he was killed by an unknown assassin, leaving all his property to his children. Later, Mrs. Hawk had been prevailed upon by a tyrant father to wed Jasper Leslie, who treated her brutally, and finally attempted to drown her in the Missouri; but she escaped death there. Jasper Leslie's persecutions extended to the children, and, only a year before our story, Leone's brother, Gerald, had run away.

Her flight followed, to avoid the persecutions of both her step-father and his villainous associate, Curtis Sydnor. Why Mrs. Hawk did not return to her children, after escaping drowning, Leone was unable to tell.

And it was destined never to be known.

Thus we come to the end of a second Black Hills story—a romance illustrating the remarkable career of Deadwood Dick, the most notorious living road-agent of this nineteenth century, according to the report of the "Pioneer."

He is still in the Hills, alternating his visits between his band and his beautiful bride, who resides in a snug little home—a toll-gate—on the Bazeman trail.

Audley, the traitor, is yet alive, at last accounts, but his death by the vengeful hand of his betrayed brethren is only a matter of time. And when he "passes in his checks," Bessie will undoubtedly wed Donald Yates, to whom she is fondly attached. Calamity Jane I don't think will ever marry; her life will continue that of the dare-devil and reckless adventurer that she is, until the end.

The recent sale of Golden Bar netted her and Donald a princely sum.

The reader has noticed the casual introduction of Buffalo Ben. He is a living character, whose full history is in the author's hands, and will form a subject for another *Half-Dime Library* romance, in which will reappear, in new guise, the Prince of the Road, DEADWOOD DICK!

DESCRIPTION OF BLACK HARPER, A VERITABLE CHARACTER IN BLACK HILLS HISTORY, AS HE APPEARED TO THE FUGITIVES ON PAGE 3.

The horseman was a brawny, powerfully built man, with immense limbs and muscles, and great depth of chest. His face was covered from nose to shirt-collar with thick black beard, the mustache of which reached across each cheek, the ends hanging down beyond his ears. His eyes were dark and sinister, and brows shaggy, but what was most remarkable of all, was his forehead, which was low and retreating, and jetty black in color!

Close examination, later, proved that it was neither dyed or painted, but seemingly burnt, the flesh being hard—and crackling—seared, as by flames.

A slouch hat ornamented a shock of black hair upon his head, and a tanned, embroidered suit of buck-

skin fitted his powerful figure, ending with beaded moccasins and leggings.

Beside the two handsome Colt's revolvers in his grasp, a rifle of the unequalled Remington pattern was slung to his back, and a long dirk in a sheath hung at his hip. The horse he bestrode was a giant Mexican beast, fiery and restless, as was evidenced by its fierce champing of the bits and pawing of the pebbly ground.

THE END.

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